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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

ساڈھ روزنامہ بنگلور

Website: salarnews.in | www.magzter.com | 18 FEBRUARY 2025 | TUESDAY | BENGALURU | 19 SHABAN, 1446 AH | Vol 4 | Issue No 49 | Pages: 8

USAID biggest scam in history: PM's adviser

NEW DELHI, 17 FEB

Sanjeev Sanyal, an adviser to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has called the United States Agency for Inter-national Development (USAID) as the "biggest scam in human history." His remarks came a day after DOGE announced the cancellation of funds allocated for various international projects under the Biden administration. These included USD 21 million for "voter turnout in India".USAID, the largest humanitarian arm of the US, has been the top target of the DOGE.—*PTI*

Siddaramaiah to present Karnataka budget on 7 March

BENGALURU, 17 FEB

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, who is also the Finance Minister, said he will present the state budget for 2025-26 on 7 March. This will be the 16th consecutive budget to be presented by him.

Speaking to reporters, Siddaramaiah said, "The Assembly session will begin from 3 March. As this will be the first session in the new year, the Governor will address the joint session of both Houses of the state legislature on 3 March. There will be discussion on the Governor's address on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday (4, 5 and 6 March). On Friday (7 March), I will present the budget for 2025-26."—*PTI*

Pitroda says China not big threat, BJP pounces on Cong

NEW DELHI, 17 FEB

Congress leader Sam Pitroda on Monday said that threat from China, India's nuclear armed neighbour, is often blown out of proportion and suggested that New Delhi should stop considering Beijing as an enemy. BJP cited Indian Overseas Congress leader's comments to target the opposition party, claiming that his remarks are in line with its leaders' statements in support of China.

Addressing a press conference, BJP MP Sudhanshu Trivedi sought to draw a link between US-based Pitroda's remarks, US-based groups funding for "voter turnout" in India and the ruling party's charges against Congress MP Gaurav Gogoi for his alleged links to Pakistan. —*PTI*

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Gujarat deportees from the US arrive in Ahmedabad

AHMEDABAD, 17 FEB

Two flights carrying 33 individuals from Gujarat, deported from the US for illegal residency, arrived at Ahmedabad airport from Amritsar on Monday. This group is part of a larger contingent of 112 Indians who were transferred to Amritsar on a US military aircraft late on Sunday. The arrival of these deportees has raised the total number of Gujarat residents sent back to 74 since 6 February. The first flight, carrying three deportees from Mehsana and Gandhinagar, landed at approximately noon, followed by a second flight with 30 individuals at around 2pm. Earlier, on 16 February, eight residents from Gujarat were also repatriated on a flight from Amritsar.—*PTI*

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Enough! SC fumes at too many pleas over Places of Worship Act

SC defers hearing to first week of April

NEW DELHI, 17 FEB

Expressing displeasure over filing of several pleas on the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, the Supreme Court on Monday said a three-judge bench will hear in April the pending post-notice petitions.

"Enough is enough. There has to be an end to this," said Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna asserting that the Supreme Court will not hear any new petition in this matter.

"There is a limit to which petitions can be filed. So many IAs (interim applications) have been filed we might not be able to take it up", the CJI said, adding that a date may be given in March.

The top court, through its 12 December, 2024 order, effectively stalled proceedings in about 18 lawsuits filed by various Hindu parties seeking survey to ascertain original religious character of 10 mosques,

including Gyanvapi at Varanasi, Shahi Idgah Masjid at Mathura and Shahi Jama Masjid, at Sambhal where four people died in clashes.

It had then listed all the petitions for an effective hearing on 17 February.

Post 12 December, several petitions have been filed, including by AIMIM Chief Asaduddin Owaisi, Samajwadi Party leader and Kairana MP Iqra Choudhary and the Congress Party, seeking effective implementation of the 1991 law.

Choudhary, the Lok Sabha MP from Uttar Pradesh's Kairana, on February 14 sought to curb the increasing trend of legal actions targeting mosques and dargahs, which he submitted threaten communal harmony and the secular fabric of the country. The top court previously agreed to examine a separate plea of Owaisi with a similar prayer.

The Akhil Bhartiya Sant Samiti, a Hindu outfit, had moved the top court seeking to intervene in cases filed against the validity of provisions of the 1991 law.

The law prohibits conversion of any place of worship and provides for the maintenance of the religious character of any place of worship as it existed on 15 August, 1947. —*PTI*

QATAR'S EMIR IN INDIA

Emir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al-Thani, who arrived here on Monday on a two-day state visit to India, will meet President Droupadi Murmu and hold talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi on 18 February. Extending a rare gesture of hospitality, Modi went to the airport to receive the Emir of Qatar, who arrived in Delhi in the evening. An exchange of MoUs is scheduled for Tuesday afternoon

PHOTO: PTI

Internet cut off as communal clashes break out in Bihar town

JAMUI, 17 FEB

A clash broke out between two communities during a religious procession in Bihar's Jamui, prompting the state government to suspend internet services in the district, an official said.

Three people were injured in the clash in Jhajha on Sunday, and nine people were arrested, Jamui District Magistrate Abhilasha Sharma said.

A police official has also been suspended for dereliction of duty, she said.

The district police on Monday conducted a flag march in Jhajha to ensure

PHOTO: X

that the situation does not escalate further, and a case has been registered against 50-60 unidentified individuals.

"The incident took place yesterday when a clash broke out between members of two communities during a religious procession in Jhajha. Members of both sides resorted to stone-throwing, which caused injuries to three persons. The situation was immediately brought under control by the police," the district magistrate told PTI.

"A case has been registered and people involved in the incident will be arrested. So far nine people have been apprehended in connection with the incident," she said.

"Now, in the interest of maintenance of public order, the internet services have been suspended in the district till 18 February," the DM added. —*PTI*

Modi's panel finalises next CEC's name

NEW DELHI, 17 FEB

- Current CEC Rajiv Kumar will retire on Tuesday. Congress has called for the selection meeting to be postponed until the Supreme Court hears a petition on the case.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's selection committee has reportedly recommended a name for the next Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) to President Droupadi Murmu. The panel, which also includes Union Home Minister Amit Shah and Leader of the Opposition Rahul Gandhi, convened on Monday evening, and sources indicate the official notification for the new CEC's appointment could be issued shortly.

Current CEC Rajiv Kumar will retire on Tuesday upon reaching the age of 65. The Congress party has called for the selection meeting to be postponed until the Supreme Court hears a petition on the constitution of the selection panel on 19 February. Congress leader Abhishek Manu Singhvi argued that removing the Chief Justice of India from the committee undermines the credibility of the Election Commission.

He urged the government to delay its decision until after the court hearing, to ensure a fair process. Traditionally, the senior-most election commissioner would be promoted to CEC, but changes to the selection process last year now involve a search committee that proposes candidates for the Prime Minister's consideration. Following Kumar's retirement, Gyanesh Kumar, the current senior-most commissioner, is positioned to potentially take over. —*PTI*

In unusual move, Rlys gives ₹1.99 cr to stampede victims

NEW DELHI, 17 FEB

In an unusual move, the Indian Railways gave Rs 1.99 crore cash outside the mortuaries of three Delhi hospitals to family members of victims killed in Saturday night's stampede, according to a report by NewsLaundry.

The ex-gratia payments were handed over in large sums, with each family getting Rs 10 lakh all in cash despite official guidelines limiting cash disembarrassment to Rs 50,000 for immediate relief.

At least 18 people were killed in the stampede at the New Delhi Railway Station.

The Railways announced ex-gratia amounts of Rs 10 lakh to each of the families of those who died, Rs 2.5 lakh to those grievously injured, and Rs 1 lakh for "simple" injuries.

The official announcement for ex-gratia was made at 11am on Sunday, though the distribution started at 4 am in the morning that day.

By noon on Sunday, almost all the bodies were picked up from the three hospitals – Dr Ram Manohar Lohia hospital, Lok Nayak Jai Prakash Narain hospital, and Lady Hardinge hospital – and transported by families to their respective homes. —*Salar News*

At least 18 people were killed in the stampede at the New Delhi Railway Station ***PHOTO: X***

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PIL OVER DELHI STAMPEDE REACHES SC

NEW DELHI, 17 FEB

Two days after the stampede at New Delhi Railway Station claimed 18 lives and left 15 others injured, a PIL was filed in the Supreme Court seeking immediate action to prevent such disasters in the future.

The PIL, filed by advocate Vishal Tiwari, has sought a direction to the Centre and other authorities for implementation and consideration of a 2014 report of the National Disaster Management Authority on "Managing Crowd at Events and Venues of Mass Gathering".

The plea said despite the availability of modern technology and sufficient security personnel, stampedes continue to occur, reflecting a failure in preparedness. —*PTI*

OFFICIALS SURPRISED

Bihar women claim Modi permitted free train travel

PATNA, 17 FEB

A senior railway official in Bihar was taken aback when a group of rural women claimed that Prime Minister Narendra Modi had permitted them to travel without tickets.

The incident occurred at Buxar railway station, where the Danapur Divisional Railway Manager (DRM) Jayant Kumar was inspecting the premises in light of an unexpected surge in pilgrims heading to the Prayagraj Maha Kumbh.

The conversation, which became viral on social media, unfolded when the DRM inquired whether the women had tickets. Upon their negative response, he asked who had informed them they could travel without one. The women confidently replied, "Narendra Modi told us so," prompting laughter from bystanders and a moment for the DRM to collect himself.

He clarified to the women that their understanding was incorrect and that no authority, including the Prime Minister, had given permission for ticketless travel. He emphasised that they should obtain tickets to avoid penalties for fare evasion.

Later, addressing reporters, the DRM noted that arrangements had been made for the Maha Kumbh akin to those during major festive seasons. He remarked that the continued influx of pilgrims beyond expected levels was unusual, but railway services were adequately prepared. The Maha Kumbh officially concludes on 26 February, coinciding with the Maha Shivratri festival, with over 500 million visitors reported to have attended for a holy dip in the confluence of rivers at Prayagraj. —*PTI*

Passengers in a crowded coach of a train at the Prayagraj Railway Station amid rush due to Maha Kumbh Mela on Monday ***PHOTO: PTI***

4.0 QUAKE WAKES DELHI UP WITH A JOLT, NO CASUALTY

NEW DELHI, 17 FEB

Strong tremors were felt in the national capital and adjoining regions as an earthquake of 4.0 magnitude struck the region early on Monday.

There were no immediate reports of any damage or injuries. The epicentre of the quake was in the Jheel Park area of Dhaula Kuan and there were some reports of people hearing a loud sound as the ground shook. The National Centre for Seismology said the earthquake struck at a focal depth of 5km at 5.36 am. Shallow earthquakes, originating five or 10km below the surface, tend to cause more damage than those originating deep below the surface. The Jheel Park region has been experiencing smaller, low-magnitude quakes once every two to three years. The strong tremors triggered by the earthquake prompted residents of several high-rise buildings in Delhi, Noida, Greater Noida and Ghaziabad to rush out of their homes. Delhi is located about 250km from the seismically-active Himalayan collision zone and experiences shaking frequently from far- and near-field earthquakes. —*PTI*

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UK PM says ready to put troops in Ukraine

LONDON, 17 FEB

United Kingdom Prime Minister Keir Starmer said is he prepared to put troops send British on the ground in Ukraine if it could help secure a peace deal. Writing in the Daily Telegraph, Starmer's comments came just before European leaders had an emergency talk in Paris.

Writing in the Daily Telegraph, Starmer said the crisis was a generational moment and was an existential question for Europe.

"I do not say that lightly. I feel very deeply the responsibility that comes with potentially putting British servicemen and women in harm's way," Starmer said. "But any role in helping to guarantee Ukraine's security is helping to guarantee the security of our continent."

Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, UK Prime Ministers have refused to consider sending troops to Ukraine, making Starmer's statement a shift in the country's stance. Starmer further condemned US President Donald Trump's talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin, ignoring Ukrainian

Keir Starmer and Volodymyr Zelenskyy ***PHOTO: X***

representation. "We cannot have another situation like Afghanistan, where the US negotiated directly with the Taliban and cut out the Afghan government," Starmer said. However, he simultaneously highlighted the importance of the US. "US support will remain critical and a US security guarantee is essential for a lasting peace, because only the US can deter Putin from attacking again." —*Agencies*

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BR Patil is Deputy Chairman of State Planning panel

BENGALURU, 17 FEB

Senior Congress lawmaker BR Patil, who recently resigned as Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's adviser, was on Monday appointed as the Deputy Chairman of the Karnataka State Policy and Planning Commission. The Aland MLA is entitled to Cabinet-rank emoluments with immediate effect, an official notification said. Patil, earlier this month resigned from the post of Policy & Planning adviser to the CM. Considered close to Siddaramaiah, Patil, following his resignation, had said there were issues, and he would meet and discuss them with the CM, if he is called. Patil was earlier also critical of the functioning of some ministers in the Siddaramaiah Cabinet. *—PTI*

City woman hangs herself after killing 4-yr-old daughter

BENGALURU, 17 FEB

A 34-year-old woman died by suicide after allegedly killing her four-year-old daughter here, police said on Monday. Shruti, who is the president of Pavagada Gram Panchayat first killed her daughter, Roshni by hanging her from a ceiling fan using a dupatta and later died by suicide, they added. The incident occurred at Ramaiah Layout in Nagasandra on Sunday evening when Shruti's husband was not at home. A suicide note recovered from the spot stated that she was being harassed by her husband for dowry and that he had an illicit relationship with another woman, a senior police officer said. Police said a case of abetment to suicide had been registered. *—PTI*

3,000 linemen to be recruited, says Minister George

HAVERI, 17 FEB

Energy Minister KJ George announced plans to recruit 3,000 linemen by the end of April to address the state's worker shortage. This initiative aims to strengthen the workforce and ensure a more reliable electricity supply across Karnataka. "Due to the severe drought last year, the state faced an electricity shortage, but the issue lasted only a month," he said. To address electricity issues related to agricultural pump sets, the government is prioritising the Kusum-B scheme, which provides solar-powered pump sets to farmers. "The state government has increased its subsidy share to 50 per cent, while the central government offers a 30 per cent subsidy. Farmers only need to pay 20 per cent of the cost to receive a solar pump set. This scheme will significantly benefit them." *—PTI*

The swearing-in ceremony of Justice Taj Ali Moulasab Nadaf, appointed as Additional Judge of the Karnataka High Court was held on Monday in Court Hall, Bengaluru, with a welcome address by the Chairman of Karnataka State Bar Council Vishalraghu HL

PHOTO: X

Reddy blames Centre for metro fare hike

Transport Minister also alleged that BJP leaders were spreading lies to misguide the public

According to the Transport Minister, any metro that wants to hike fares must first write a letter to the central government ***PHOTO: X***

BENGALURU, 17 FEB

Karnataka Transport Minister Ramalinga Reddy on Monday held the central government responsible for the recent fare hike of the Bengaluru metro and alleged that BJP leaders were "spreading lies to misguide the public".

The Bengaluru Metro Rail Corporation Limited (BMRCL) recently implemented a fare hike on the recommendation of the Fare Fixation Committee, following which the maximum fare has been increased from Rs 60 to Rs 90 and the minimum balance has been raised from Rs 50 to Rs 90.

Ramalinga Reddy ***PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA***

He urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Union Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs Manohar Lal Khattar to intervene and reduce the metro fare.

Reddy also hit out at Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnav over the same issue and suggested that he first read the Metro Act, along with its rules and regulations since he is the Railway Minister and also in charge of the metro.

According to the Transport Minister, any metro that wants to hike fares must first write a letter to the central government.

For all metros, the Central Urban Development Minister is the chairman. The metro board will then constitute a fare fixation committee, not only for Bengaluru but for all metros and the head of that committee will be a retired judge, Reddy said.

For Bengaluru, retired judge R Tharani is the chairman of that committee, and Satyendra Pal Singh, the additional secretary to the central government, who is one of the members, represents the Centre while retired IAS officer EV Ramana Reddy represents Karnataka, Reddy added.

Asserting that the Karnataka government is not responsible for the hike, he accused BJP leaders of making allegations against the State government. *—PTI*

Cong high command to decide leadership, says CM

BENGALURU, 17 FEB

Amid speculations about leadership change in Karnataka, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Monday said it is for the Congress high command to decide.

There have been talks in the State's political circles, especially in the ruling Congress party, about a chief minister change later this year, under a "rotational chief minister" or "power-sharing" formula.

"It is for the high command to decide," Siddaramaiah told reporters in response to a question on discussions about leadership change.

Deputy Chief Minister Shivakumar, who is also the state Congress president, is a strong chief ministerial aspirant and has made no secret of his ambition to become the CM.

- There were some reports that a compromise had been reached based on a 'rotational chief minister formula,' according to which Shivakumar will become CM after two-and-half years

There have been time and again attempts by a section of party leaders and workers to project Shivakumar as the next chief minister.

There was stiff competition between Siddaramaiah and Shivakumar for the chief minister's post after the declaration of Assembly election results in May 2023, and the Congress had managed to convince the latter and made him the Deputy Chief Minister.

There were some reports at the time that a compromise had been reached based on a "rotational chief minister formula," according to which Shivakumar will become CM after two-and-half years, but they have not been officially confirmed by the party.

A section consisting of ministers from SC/ST communities had even held dinner meetings last month, which was seen as an attempt to revive the demand for a Dalit or an AHINDA (Kannada acronym for minorities, backward classes and Dalits) to become the next chief minister, in case Siddaramaiah demits office. *—PTI*

CM Siddaramaiah held meeting with farmer leaders at Vidhana Soudha in Bengaluru

PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD

DKS slams R Ashoka for being opportunistic

BENGALURU, 17, FEB

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar on Monday lashed out at Leader of Opposition R Ashoka for criticising his city rounds to inspect road construction. "When BJP CMs were doing city rounds, Ashok accompanied him.

Was it for a photo shoot?" he said while replying to Ashok's social media post that his city rounds was a photo shoot rather than a genuine inspection.

"We are doing our job. White topping is a big budget project. It is imperative for us to ensure that the project is progressing well and hence I wanted to I oversee it personally.

We would like to complete the Rs 1700 crore project on time," he said. *—PTI*

DON'T 'MISUSE' AICC & HIGH COMMAND'S NAME: MINISTER RAJANNA TO DKS

BENGALURU, 17 FEB

The power tussle within the ruling Congress in Karnataka seems to be intensifying with Cooperation Minister KN Rajanna on Monday hitting back at Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar, urging him not to "misuse" the name of the AICC and the party high command.

He was reacting to Shivakumar's statement on Sunday—in which he indirectly hit out at Rajanna and other party leaders and ministers considered close to Chief Minister Siddaramaiah—stating that there is no need for anyone to make statements 'misusing' the name of the CM, the undisputed leader of Congress in Karnataka.

The State Congress chief, Shivakumar who has made no secret of his ambition to become the CM, chose not to respond to Rajanna's comments.

Addressing media here, Rajanna said, "I too agree that the Chief Minister's name should not be misused. We should also tell him (Shivakumar) not to misuse the AICC and high command's name, as he repeatedly mentions the AICC and the high command." *—PTI*

Family of 4 found dead in Mysuru apartment

The deceased are Chetan, 45, his wife Rupali, 43, their son Kushal, 15, and Chetan's mother Priyamvada, 62 ***PHOTO: SALAR***

MYSURU, 17 FEB

A family of four members were found dead at a residential apartment in Vishweshwaraiah Nagar of Mysuru on Monday, police said.

The deceased have been identified as Chetan, 45, his wife Rupali, 43, their son Kushal, 15, and Chetan's mother Priyamvada, 62.

Chethan was found hanging, while son Kushal, a class X student, appeared to have been strangled

Citing the findings of a preliminary investigation, a senior police officer said that Chetan might have poisoned his family members before hanging himself.

Mysuru Police Commissioner Seema Latkar said the family of four were living in two separate flats in Sankalp Apartment within Vidyaranyapura police limits. While Priyamvada resided in of the flats, Chetan, his wife and their son lived in another flat. Latkar said Chetan hailed from Gorur in Hassan and his wife is from Mysuru.

Chetan had called his brother Bharath in US, who in turn called Rupali's parents to check on them, and when they visited the apartment, the incident came to light. The police visited the spot on receiving information.

Latkar said Chetan was a mechanical engineer and worked in Dubai before moving to Mysuru in 2019. He worked as a labourer contractor here who used to send labourers to Saudi, she said. *—Salar News with PTI*

Belagavi: Lenders' harassment leads to another suicide

BELAGAVI, 17 FEB

In yet another tragic incident, a man from Raibag town in Belagavi district ended his life, allegedly due to relentless harassment by private money lenders and financial institutions.

According to the Medico Legal Case (MLC) report from Belagavi Institute of Medical Sciences (BIMS), Basavaraj Hatti was admitted on 11 February after consuming poison. Despite medical efforts, he succumbed on Sunday night.

Basavaraj's wife, in her complaint to the Raibag police, blamed the persistent pressure from private lenders and microfinance institutions for her husband's death. She alleged that the loan recovery staff repeatedly harassed him, demanding repayment of Rs 2.5 lakh, which he had taken under a weekly installment scheme. The threats of confiscating household belongings if payments were missed only worsened his distress.

Basavaraj's death marks the fourth such suicide in Belagavi district within a month.

To curb such tragic incidents and address the growing concerns over harassment, the Karnataka government enforced a new ordinance on 12 February. *—Salar News*

TUNNEL OF PROGRESS

A glimpse of the ongoing tunnel work at MG Road Underground Metro Station for the Namma Metro, connecting Shivajinagar to Vellara Junction in Bengaluru, on Monday ***PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD***

Teen boy kills 4-yr-old in accidental firing

MANDYA, 17 FEB

A four-year-old boy has died and his mother sustained severe injuries after a 15-year-old boy accidently fired a loaded gun while he was playing with the firearm at Nagamangala taluk of this district, police said on Monday.

The deceased is identified as Abhijeet, a child of migrant labourers from West Bengal, they said.

The incident occurred around 5.45 pm on Sunday, in a poultry farm where the family has been employed, police said.

The 15-year-old boy came to the small house in the poultry farm and noticed the Single Barrel Breech Loading (SBBL) firearm hanging on the wall.

He took the weapon and started playing with it and accidently the boy discharged the weapon, hitting the four-year-old child in the abdomen and injuring his 30-year-old mother on her leg.

According to police, Lipika and her husband Shashank, who are migrant labourers from West Bengal working at a poultry farm belong to Congress leader Narasimhamurthy of the village from several years.

The injured were immediately taken to a hospital where the boy succumbed to his injuries. *—Salar News with PTI*

ANOTHER DRY SUMMER?

Yadgir's Rs 56.86 cr water project delayed by 3 yrs

YADGIR, 17 FEB

A much-needed Rs 56.86 crore drinking water project from Sannati Barrage has missed its deadline by three years, leaving Yadgir residents struggling with an unreliable water supply. Initially set for completion within 18 months, the project remains incomplete, raising concerns over yet another summer of water scarcity.

The pipeline installation from the river, 18 km away, to the city's filter bed lake is nearing completion. However, work in the Sannati Barrage water collection area remains unfinished, further delaying the project.

As a result, residents continue to face periodic water shortages, with no clear resolution in sight.

In contrast, the Rs 86.82 crore Amrut-2 project, aimed at providing 24/7 drinking water, is advancing swiftly. According to municipal officials, pipeline installations across 31 wards are nearly complete, with 12,828 households set to receive tap water connections once finished. *— Salar News*

AMRUT-2 PROJECT OVERVIEW

Cost: Rs 86.82cr

Target: 12,828 households

Benefit: 24/7 drinking water upon completion

Bidri art's global ambassador Rauf no more

BIDAR, 17 FEB

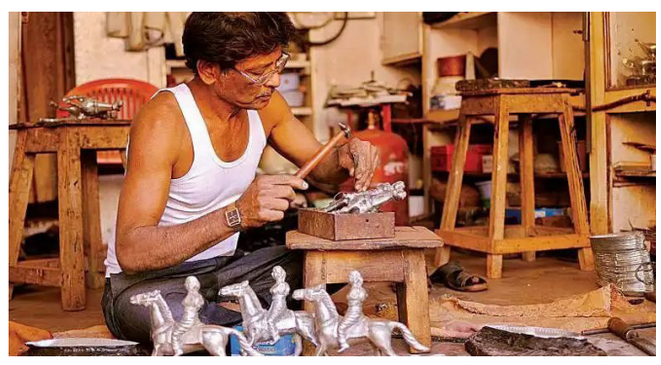
Muhammad Abdul Rauf, the artist who enriched the Bidri art and took it across the seas, is now a cherished memory.

Rauf had studied only up to the fifth grade and was fluent only in Urdu.

The 60-year-old artist collapsed suddenly while chatting with family members at his home in Bidar's Kusum Galli, near Chaubara. He is survived by his wife, four daughters, and two sons.

He was one of the five artisans credited with keeping Bidri art alive in Bidar district. By blending traditional Bidri craftsmanship with a contemporary touch, he played a key role in bringing it to an international audience.

In 2015, he was honored with the 'Shilpaguru' award by then-President Pranab Mukherjee. *—Salar News*



He was one of the five artisans credited with keeping Bidri art alive in Bidar district ***PHOTO: SALAR***

BGB delegation to have talks with BSF today

NEW DELHI, 17 FEB

A high-level delegation of the Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB), the border guarding force of the neighbouring country, reached Delhi on Monday for bi-lateral talks on issues like fencing and attacks on BSF personnel and civilians by Bangladeshi miscreants, officials said. The 55th Director General-Level Border Coordination Conference between the two forces will be held at the BSF headquarters on Lodhi Road here. The bilateral talks will be held on Tuesday. The Bangladeshi delegation will be here till 20 February. They may also call on some senior Union home ministry authorities, the officials said." *—PTI*

PHOTO: ANI

DMK, allies to protest against Centre over NEP

CHENNAI, 17 FEB

Leaders of the DMK and its allies will stage a massive protest on 18 February to condemn the Centre for its alleged betrayal of Tamil Nadu and insistence on NEP. The MK Stalin-led party accused the Centre of making all efforts to impinge on the rights of the state. "Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan is saying the Centre will not release funds to Tamil Nadu's education department until the NEP is accepted. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharam is partial in allocating funds for Tamil Nadu and she is continuously ignoring projects for the state," the DMK headquarters said in a press release. The DMK further claimed that the NEP was a step to impose Hindi under the guise of the three-language policy. *—PTI*

Yamuna river to be clean by Dec 2027, says officer

NEW DELHI, 17 FEB

The Delhi government will make all the sewage treatment plants in the city, including six that are being newly set up, fully functional to completely check the flow of sewage and industrial effluents into the Yamuna in the next two years, and clean the river by December 2027, Additional Chief Secretary Navin Chaudhary said on Monday. During a visit to oversee the work to clean the Yamuna, Chaudhary, who is in charge of the irrigation and flood control department, said commitments have been made at the highest level for cleaning the river in three years. The entire 57-km stretch of the Yamuna in Delhi, from Haryana where it enters the city to the Uttar Pradesh border where it exits, will be cleaned, he said. Prime Minister Narendra Modi had said that the Yamuna, suffering from heavy pollution, will be cleaned no matter how much effort or time it takes. *—PTI*

173 public servants under probe yet to be suspended

THANE, 17 FEB

A staggering total of 173 public servants in Maharashtra remain un-suspended despite ongoing investigations into corruption allegations since 2012, as indicated in a report from the Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) released on Saturday. The report outlines that from 1 January, 2012, to 31 January this year, 30 Class I officials, 29 Class II officials, 106 Class III, and eight Class IV officials have been scrutinised for graft, yet none have faced suspension. The Mumbai range reported the highest number of cases at 46, followed by Thane with 38, Aurangabad with 22, Pune with 18, Nashik with 16, Nagpur with 12, Amravati with 11, and Nanded with 10. *—PTI*

Cong distances itself from Sam's China remark, BJP livid

BJP calls Cong pro-China; Cong reaffirms China concerns

NEW DELHI, 17 FEB

BJP has targeted the Congress party in response to comments made by Sam Pitroda, a leader of the Indian Overseas Congress, who downplayed the threat posed by China. BJP national spokesperson Sudhanshu Trivedi linked Pitroda's remarks to what he described as a pattern of pro-China sentiments among Congress leaders, claiming they undermine India's sovereignty.

During a press conference, Trivedi suggested that Pitroda's views correlate with allegations of foreign funding for anti-national initiatives in India. He referred to Congress as the "mohabbat ki dukan" for elements opposing the nation, including foreign entities like George Soros.

BJP has often accused Soros of funding and organising programmes against the government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and has claimed of his links with the Congress.

Indian Overseas Congress leader Sam Pitroda suggested that fears regarding China are often exaggerated **PHOTO: PTI**

Pitroda suggested that fears regarding China are often exaggerated, a position that drew sharp criticism from the BJP, particularly given the sacrifices made by Indian soldiers during the Galwan clash.

Trivedi claimed that Pitroda's comments should not be seen in isolation as he recalled Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's positive words in the past for China's growth story and the manner in which it tackled issues like unemployment.

In light of the controversy, the Congress party swiftly distanced itself from Pitroda's statements. AICC General Secretary Jairam Ramesh asserted that Pitroda's opinion does not reflect the party's stance, emphasising that China remains India's foremost security challenge. Ramesh highlighted the Congress's ongoing criticism of the Modi government's handling of China and questioned the timing of recent efforts to normalise relations, given China's occupation of significant territory in Ladakh since May 2020. "China remains our foremost foreign policy, external security, as well as economic challenge. The INC has repeatedly raised questions on the Modi Govt's approach to China, including the PM's public clean chit to it on June 19, 2020. Our most recent statement on China was on 28th January, 2025," he said.

The BJP has called for Congress to clarify Pitroda's position and to address moral questions regarding foreign influence in Indian elections. With the 2024 Lok Sabha elections approaching, the exchanges between the two parties underscore the heightened political stakes surrounding national security issues. *—PTI*

AAP FLAGS DELAY

BJP set for oath ceremony in Delhi on 20 Feb

NEW DELHI, 17 FEB

The next Chief Minister of Delhi, along with the new council of ministers, is expected to take the oath of office at Ramlila Maidan on 20 February. Sources indicate that the ceremony will occur around 4.30pm, with attendance anticipated from senior BJP leaders, including chief ministers from party-ruled states.

A meeting of the BJP legislative party that was initially scheduled for Monday has been postponed until Wednesday. During this gathering, the party will finalise its candidate for the Chief Minister's position and discuss arrangements for the oath-taking ceremony.

The BJP's victory in the recent Assembly elections has marked its return to power in Delhi after over 26 years, with results announced on 8 February. The party secured 48 seats in the 70-member assembly, ending AAP's decade-long rule.

Meanwhile, AAP has launched a scathing attack on BJP regarding its delay in appointing a chief minister and forming a cabinet in Delhi. Acting Chief Minister Atishi asserted that the BJP lacks the leadership necessary to govern the national capital effectively. "It has been ten days since the election results were declared. People anticipated that the BJP would announce its chief minister and cabinet on 9 February and commence developmental projects. It is now evident that they have no one suitable to run Delhi," she stated. She accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of lacking confidence in any of the 48 BJP MLAs, asserting that the party has no credible vision or plan for governance. "BJP is fully aware that their agenda is merely to exploit the people of Delhi. If they cannot present a capable leader for governance, how can they serve the public?" she questioned. *—PTI*

SIT to investigate Pak man as Gogoi denies wife's ISI links

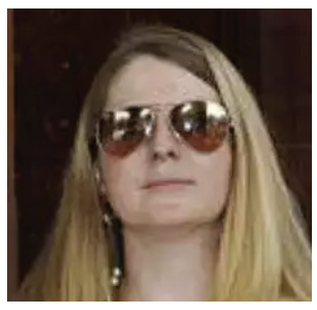
GUWAHATI, 17 FEB

Amid controversy over the alleged ISI links of Congress MP Gaurav Gogoi's British wife, the Assam government on Monday constituted a Special Investigation Team (SIT) to investigate a case against Pakistani national Ali Tauqeer Sheikh for his social media comments on India's internal affairs.

Sheikh, an advisor of the Pakistan Planning Commission and a former colleague of Colburn, was charged under various sections of the BNS and the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA).

The four-member SIT team will be headed by CID Special DGP M P Gupta, AIGP (Admin) Pranabjyoti Goswami, SP CM's Special Vigilance Cell Rosie Kalita and Additional Deputy Commissioner of Police, Guwahati (West) Moitrayee Deka.

Meanwhile, Gogoi, on the other hand, said the BJP-led government in Assam is free to conduct any inquiry on the issue of his spouse Elizabeth Colburn's alleged links with the Pakistani spy agency, but he and his party know where they stand.



Gaurav Gogoi and his Elizabeth Colburn **PHOTOS: PTI**

"Pursuant to the registration of the case, the DGP, Assam Police, has constituted a Special Investigation Team (SIT) to investigate the matter. Assam Police will conduct a professional and completely objective investigation," the chief minister posted on X.

Sarma said earlier in the day that an FIR was lodged against Sheikh as his comments on India's internal affairs and parliamentary matters were aimed at disrupting communal harmony and the nation's interests.

The Assam Cabinet on Sunday had decided not to register any case against the Congress MP or his British spouse but instructed the DGP to file an FIR against Ali Tauqeer Sheikh. BJP have been attacking Gogoi, over his wife's alleged connection with the ISI.

In a press conference, Gogoi said Sarma has been changing his stance every day but "we are clear from the first day and know where we stand. Earlier, the chief minister had attacked me and I was the villain. But since yesterday, he has made me the victim," the Congress leader said. *—PTI*

Kerala's industrial growth data inflated: Oppn

KOCHI, 17 FEB

VD Satheesan, the Leader of Opposition in the Kerala Assembly, has accused the state government of exaggerating industrial growth figures and manipulating data. Speaking to the media, Satheesan refuted claims that Kerala ranks first in the Ease of Doing Business index, highlighting that the World Bank discontinued the index in 2021 due to concerns over data manipulation.

His remarks followed a political controversy sparked by Congress MP Shashi Tharoor's article praising Kerala's entrepreneurial environment under the LDF government. Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan defended the government, stating that Tharoor's article disproves the opposition's allegations against Kerala.

In response, Satheesan pointed to stagnant GST registrations for new enterprises, claiming that if 300,000 new entrepreneurs existed, there should be 150,000 GST registrations, yet only 30,000 new registrations are reported. *—PTI*

Palaniswami eyes 2026 polls with mega alliance

VELLORE, 17 FEB

AIADMK general secretary Edappadi K Palaniswami has said that his party would form a mega alliance for the 2026 Assembly election to take on the DMK and win polls. He also targeted Chief Minister M K Stalin over crimes against women and children.

Addressing a public meeting, a conference of the party's Ilaigyargal-Ilam Pengal Pasarai (youth forum), he mocked at DMK president Stalin for saying that the constituents of his party led alliance in the state were of the same ideology. "In that case, what is the need for separate parties?, all the parties could be merged with the DMK," he said.

As regards the AIADMK, electoral alliance and ideology are two differnt things and alliances are only meant to prevent split of votes in order to win polls, he said.

Though actor-politician Vijay-led TVK had recently said that it would not align with the AIADMK, speculation in this regard continues.

Mocking at Stalin for his comment that young persons addressed him affectionately as 'Appa' (father), the AIADMK chief, referring to crimes against women and children, asked if the chief minister did not hear the 'Appa' cries of women and children who were subjected to sexual harassment and assault.

Palaniswami accused the DMK of double standards as it had taken part in the late Chief Minister, M Karunanidhi's stamp release event alongside Union ministers from the BJP.

The AIADMK top leader claimed that the INDIA bloc was in a shambles eversince the DMK associated with it and alleged that the constituents are not truly committed to it.

Blaming the DMK for compromising on its ideolgoy to capture power and for its "somersault", he questioned the Stalin-led party's commitment to its ideology.

Recalling the DMK's alliances since 1999 with the BJP and Congress, he said Stalin does not have any locus standi to criticise the AIADMK. *—PTI*

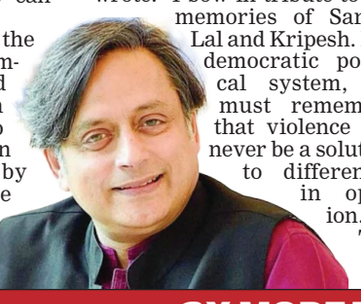
Tharoor deletes FB poster calling CPI(M) 'cannibals' amid row

T'PURAM, 17 FEB

Amid ongoing controversy over his article praising the Left government in Kerala, Congress Working Committee (CWC) member and MP Shashi Tharoor on Monday withdrew a poster, reportedly from the KPCC, that he had shared on his Facebook page, which referred to the CPI(M) as "cannibals".

Hours after sharing the controversial poster commemorating Kripesh and Sarathlal, the Youth Congress workers who were killed in Periya in Kasaragod district, by CPI(M) workers five years ago, Tharoor made another post, sharing their photos but without any reference to the CPI(M). The deleted poster had featured the photos of the two Youth Congress workers and read: "Our brothers who were murdered by CPI(M) cannibals." In the replacement post, alongside the victims' photos, the Thiruvananthapuram MP wrote: "I bow in tribute to the memories of Sarath Lal and Kripesh. In a democratic political system, we must remember that violence can never be a solution to differences in opinion." The development comes as he has been under attack from the rank and file of the Congress in Kerala for his article praising the state's entrepreneurial growth under the Left government. As the controversy over Tharoor's article continued, KPCC chief K Sudhakaran said that he had spoken directly to the MP and given him "good advice."

"Individuals can have their own opinions, but the party decides its official stance," Sudhakaran told re-porters in Kasaragod, responding to a question about Tharoor's article. When asked about certain leaders' demanding Tharoor to step down from the CWC, Sudhakaran said: "Let the party decide." *—PTI*



AGAINST DRUGS & RAGGING

Police use water cannons to disperse KSU activists during their protest demanding action against drugs and ragging in educational institutes, in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala on Monday **PHOTO: PTI**

3X MORE THAN 6 PARTIES

At ₹4,340 cr, BJP sees highest income

NEW DELHI, 17 FEB

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) declared the highest income among national parties for the financial year 2023-24, with earnings amounting to Rs 4,340.47 crore, according to a report by the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR). This figure represents 74.57 per cent of the total income of six national parties during this period.

The BJP's expenditure was notably lower, as it spent only 50.96 per cent of its income, totalling Rs 2,211.69 crore. In comparison, the Indian National Congress reported an income of Rs 1,225.12 crore and spent Rs 1,025.25 crore, accounting for 83.69 per cent of its income. A significant portion of party income stemmed from donations via electoral bonds.

A significant portion of party income stemmed from donations via electoral bonds **PHOTO: PTI**

BJP received the largest share at Rs 1,685.63 crore, while the Congress and the AAP obtained Rs 828.36 crore and Rs 10.15 crore, respectively. These three parties raised Rs 2,524.14 crore, equating to 43.36 per cent of their total income through this now-declared unconstitutional scheme. The report highlighted that the Congress party's primary expenditure was on election-related costs, totalling Rs 619.67 crore. Audit reports from CPI(M), Congress BJP faced delays, ranging from 12 to 66 days.

It also identified elections and administrative costs as the predominant areas of expenditure for national parties. *—PTI*

Hamas leaders' pics at Kerala fest draws flak

PALAKKAD, 17 FEB

A procession in Kerala's Palakkad district displaying images of Hamas leaders during an annual cultural fest drew sharp criticism on the social media. The banners, carried atop elephants by a group of youths, were part of the Thrithala Fest in Thrithala, Palakkad.

The display of the images led to heated discussions on the social media with many questioning the organisers for allowing such banners. The participation of Minister MB Rajesh, who is the MLA from Thrithala, and Congress leader and former MLA VT Balram has further fuelled the debate.

However, a person, part of the organising committee and wishes to remain anonymous,

accused a section of young people of attempting to trigger a communal issue over the procession. Congress leader Balram criticised a section of the media for allegedly using the controversy to target the Muslim community and Kerala.

Meanwhile, the BJP demanded that a case be registered against the event's organisers. *—PTI*

'India's Got Latent' YouTubers skip NCW hearing

NEW DELHI, 17 FEB

The National Commission for Women (NCW) has rescheduled a hearing for the creators of 'India's Got Latent' after several failed to appear following a summons regarding derogatory remarks made during their show. Notable figures including Ranveer Allahabadia, Samay Raina, and Apoorva Mukhija cited personal safety concerns and prior travel commitments as reasons for their absence. Allahabadia and Mukhija have been granted postponements to 6 March 2025, while Raina's hearing is set for 11 March, as he is currently on tour in the US. The NCW expressed disappointment over the non-compliance of Poojari and Bothra, issuing a new summons for 6 March, while Balraj Ghai's hearing is scheduled for 11 March. Maharashtra Cyber has summoned Ranveer to record his statement on 24 February. *—PTI*

Case filed against dead man for rape in Thane

THANE, 17 FEB

A case has been lodged against a deceased man for the alleged rape of a 17-year-old girl in Maharashtra's Thane district, police reported on Monday. The FIR does not detail the circumstances or timing of the accused's death. According to officials, the accused befriended the girl in Mumbra and allegedly assaulted her on several occasions between June and August 2024. He subsequently married her, despite familial opposition, and the girl recently gave birth to their child on 14 February. Local police are currently investigating the case. *—PTI*

SGPC Chief Harjinder resigns on moral grounds

CHANDIGARH, 17 FEB

Harjinder Singh Dhami has resigned as president of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) effective immediately. His decision follows the recent condemnation by Akal Takht Jathedar Giani Raghbir Singh regarding the SGPC's dismissal of Giani Harpreet Singh as Jathedar of Takht Sri Damdama Sahib. Dhami, addressing the media in Amritsar, stated, "I take responsibility and resign from the post on moral grounds." He also requested to be relieved from his position on a seven-member committee overseeing the Shiromani Akali Dal's new membership drive. Giani Raghbir Singh had previously described Harpreet Singh's termination as "highly condemnable" and "unfortunate," claiming it undermines the independence of the Takht Sahibs. The SGPC had dismissed Harpreet Singh following an executive committee meeting addressing allegations stemming from a long-standing domestic dispute. *—PTI*

Kerala announces ₹5L aid for victims killed by elephants

KOZHIKODE, 17 FEB

The Kerala government has declared a compensation package of Rs 5 lakh for the families of three individuals who lost their lives when two elephants went on the rampage during a temple festival in Koyilandy district. Devaswom Minister VN Vasavan announced the aid while visiting the temple after the incident, stating that injured individuals would receive free treatment. The unfortunate events unfolded on 13 February when the elephants, brought in for the Manakulangara Temple festival, became agitated due to the sound of firecrackers. In the ensuing chaos, the elephants clashed, leading to the collapse of a nearby building wall, which resulted in the deaths of three elderly people. *—PTI*

From snakes to trimming beard, US deportees 'travelled in hell'

Deportees had to go without food for days, travel via jungles to reach US

CHANDIGARH, 17 FEB

Promised a legal entry into the US, Mandeep Singh's life was at risk after he was made to deal with crocodiles and snakes, trim his beard despite being a Sikh, and having to go without food for days.

But his dream to secure a better life for his family in Amritsar came crashing down on 27 January when he was arrested by the US Border Patrol while trying to sneak into America via Tijuana in Mexico.

Mandeep was part of 116 Indians to be deported by a US military aircraft that landed at the Amritsar airport late on Saturday amid a crackdown by the Donald Trump administration against illegal immigrants.

Mandeep's travel agent put him on the 'donkey route' to enter the US.

"When I spoke to my agent, he said within one month I will be taken to the US in a legal way," Mandeep said.

People deported from America come out of the Amritsar Airport on Monday *PHOTO: PTI*

The agent demanded Rs 40 lakh, which he paid in two instalments.

The journey began from Amritsar to Delhi last August on a flight.

"From Delhi, I was taken to Mumbai, then Nairobi, and onwards to Amsterdam through another nation. From there, we were taken to Suriname. When I reached there, the sub-agents demanded Rs 20 lakh, which was paid back home by my family," he said.

Mandeep said, "From Suriname, we boarded a vehicle which was cramped with many people like me. We were taken to Guyana. From there it was non-stop travel for days. We crossed Guyana, then Bolivia before reaching Ecuador."

The group was then made to cross the Panama jungles.

"Here we were told by fellow travellers that if we ask too many questions, we could be shot.

For 13 days, we moved through the treacherous route that included 12 canals. Crocodiles, snakes – we had to bear all," he said.

"We ate half-baked 'rotis' and sometimes noodles, as proper food was a distant thing. We used to travel 12 hours a day," Mandeep said. *—PTI*

Sikh men forced to remove turbans

CHANDIGARH, 17 FEB

A US military aircraft carrying 112 Indians living illegally in that country landed at the Amritsar airport late on Sunday, the third such batch of Indians to be sent back amid a crackdown by the Donald Trump administration against illegal immigrants.

One of the troubling allegations involved the treatment of Sikh men on board the flight. Several deportees claimed that they were forcibly removed of their turbans before being flown back to India

The Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) strongly condemned the US authorities for allegedly not allowing the Sikh deportees to wear turbans.

SGPC officials, who were deputed for providing "langar" and bus services to the deportees, gave "dastar (turban)" to the Sikhs.

The C-17 aircraft landed at 10:03 pm, sources said. *—PTI*

PANIC GRIPS CAPITAL

Quake jolts Delhi residents

NEW DELHI, 17 FEB

Many Delhi residents were startled by strong jolts after a 4.0-magnitude earthquake struck the national capital and adjoining regions on Monday.

Anil Kumar, a resident of Sita Ram Bazar, said he never experienced such tremors before.

"I felt a strong vibration and got scared. My wife and I immediately woke up our child and rushed outside," Kumar said.

"I am a heart patient, so I panicked even more." he added.

The epicentre of the quake was in the Jheel Park area of Dhaula Kuan and there were some reports of people hearing a loud sound as the ground shook.

Another Sita Ram Bazar resident, Sundar Lal, initially mistook the noise for monkeys on the terrace.

"At first, we thought there were monkeys on our terrace making noise but then we realised it was an earthquake, so we all ran outside," he said.

A CCTV footage from the Budh Vihar area showed that as soon as the earthquake struck, a car's horn blew as its alarm went off. Deepa, a resident of West Delhi, said she was jolted by the tremors and the loud sound.

Residents rush out of their houses as earthquake tremors hit Delhi-NCR, in New Delhi on Monday morning *PHOTO: PTI*

"A similar earthquake occurred in 2012 but this one felt more intense. We were all very scared," she said.

Anil, a resident of Nehru Nagar, told PTI Videos that the moment he felt the tremor, he ran out of his house with his two-year-old daughter.

Tembors that jolted the national capital was a result of naturally occurring variation in the geological features of the region and not due to plate tectonics, a senior scientist said. Delhi region in northern India experiences frequent tremors due to both far-field and near-field earthquakes from the Himalayan and local sources, respectively.

Several places in Bihar were jolted by an earthquake of 4 magnitude that struck Siwan district on Monday. *—PTI*

IT IS POLITICAL GOONDAISM: SC REINSTATES MAYOR

NEW DELHI, 17 FEB

The Supreme Court on Monday reinstated Solan Mayor Usha Sharma in her post for the remainder of her tenure while terming her disqualification a case of "political goondaism".

A bench of Justices Surya Kant and N Kotiswar Singh made its 20 August, 2024 order absolute by which it had stayed her disqualification while terming her removal "a case of male bias".

On 20 August, last year, the top court while issuing notice on the plea of Sharma and former mayor Poonam Grover against the June, 2024 order of the High Court upholding their disqualification kept in in abeyance the fresh election for the post of the mayor of Solan in Himachal Pradesh, till further orders. The court was critical of the reasoning given by the High Court while upholding the notification of 10 June, 2024 disqualifying Sharma and Grover, who were councillors of ward nos. 12 and 8. Both Sharma and Grover were disqualified by the government for defying party directions during the election of mayor held on 7 December, 2023. *—PTI*

SC issues contempt notice to UP for razing mosque

NEW DELHI, 17 FEB

The Supreme Court has ordered Uttar Pradesh authorities to explain why contempt proceedings should not be initiated against them for demolishing a section of a mosque in Kushinagar, allegedly in violation of a previous court ruling. A bench comprising Justices B R Gavai and Augustine George Masih has also mandated that no further demolition take place until further notice.

This development follows a contempt plea claiming that authorities razed part of the Madni mosque on February 9, defying the Supreme Court's guidelines set forth in a November 2024 ruling, which prohibits demolition without a prior show cause notice and a minimum 15-day period for the affected parties to respond.

Senior advocate Huzefa Ahmadi, representing the mosque's petitioners, stated that the structure is situated on privately owned land, originally sanctioned for construction

PHOTO: PTI

in 1999. He argued that the demolition constitutes "egregious contempt" of the court's instructions. The plea alleges the authorities failed to provide the necessary hearing prior to the demolition, breaching the principles of natural justice and disregarding the religious sentiments of the local Muslim community.

The Supreme Court scheduled a hearing on the matter for two weeks from now. Meanwhile, the petitioners seek a directive to maintain the status quo at the mosque, as well as potential restoration or compensation for the damages incurred by the demolition. *—PTI*

YOGA IN NULLAH

In a bid to create awareness about making water bodies pollution-free, a yoga event was organised in a dried-up nullah in Madhya Pradesh's Indore city on Monday. The Indore Municipal Corporation cleaned the nullah that flowed during monsoon in the Panchkuian area and built well-equipped ghats there *PHOTO: X/@ADVPUSHYAMITRA*

Post stampede, tight security at stns

NEW DELHI, 17 FEB

Tight security measures are in place at the New Delhi Railway Station, prohibiting anyone from loitering on the foot overbridge without a valid reason, an official said on Monday.

A stampede at the New Delhi Railway Station claimed 18 lives on Saturday night, police said.

The officer said that many trains heading toward Prayagraj will be monitored and teams will also check the number of people on the platforms to avoid any stampede-like situation.

Delhi Police along with the Railway Protection Force (RPF) and Government Railway Police (GRP) has deployed additional personnel

Security personnel manage passengers boarding a train at the New Delhi Railway Station in New Delhi on Monday *PHOTO: PTI*

to manage rush at the station, which remained overcrowded on Sunday with thousands of passengers struggling to board trains amid heavy rush, an officer said.

Meanwhile, East Central Railway (ECR) said it has been strictly enforcing the prohibition on people's entry into stations without valid tickets in view of the heavy rush of passengers across Bihar for Maha Kumbh. *—PTI*

In 10 days, Andhra sees 2 GBS deaths, reports 17 cases

AMARAVATI, 17 FEB

A 45-year-old woman and a 10-year-old boy have died from Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS), an autoimmune neurological disorder, in Andhra Pradesh over the past ten days, as reported by Health Minister Satya Kumar Yadav on Monday.

The minister informed that Kamalamma passed away at the Government General Hospital (GGH) in Guntur on Sunday, while the young boy succumbed to the illness in a private medical college in Srikakulam ten days prior.

Currently, there are 17 reported cases of GBS in the state. Minister Yadav emphasised that GBS is a non-communicable disease with an incidence rate of approximately two cases per 100,000 individuals, and the recent fatalities do not indicate a sudden

PHOTO: ANI

surge in cases, which is considered normal. In 2024, there were a total of 267 reported cases, with 141 cases in the first half of the year and 126 in the second half. On average, 25 cases arise monthly. Most patients can be treated with standard medical care; however, serious cases may necessitate immunoglobulin treatments and ICU admission. GBS occurs when the immune system incorrectly attacks peripheral nerves, resulting in muscle weakness, numbness, and tingling sensations. *—PTI*

AFTER STUDENT'S SUICIDE

500 Nepalis 'forced to leave' Odisha varsity

BHUBANESWAR, 17 FEB

A third-year B-Tech student from Kalinga Institute of Industrial Technology (KIIT), allegedly died by suicide in her hostel, police said on Monday. The deceased is Prakriti Lamsal from Nepal.

More than 500 Nepali students were forced to leave the campus after tensions flared up following her death as students staged demonstration demanding justice.

Meanwhile, Nepal Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli said that Nepal's embassy in New Delhi had sent two officials to counsel Nepalese students.

Following his intervention, KIIT authorities appealed to Nepali students to return to campus.

The deceased's cousin lodged a complaint at Infocity police station in Bhubaneswar. He suspected that another male

The video of over 500 students being 'forcefully evicted' from Odisha's KIIT hostel went viral on social media *PHOTO: ANI*

student of the varsity was blackmailing his sister.

Bhubaneswar DCP Pinak Mishra said, "The accused student is in police custody. The police have seized the mobile phone, laptop and other gadgets of the victim."

Two busloads of Nepali students were dropped at the Cuttack Railway Station on Monday. "We were told to vacate hostel room and dropped at the railway station. We had to appear for examination on 28 February." a male student said at the Cuttack railway station. *—PTI*

India army ready for any border situation: J&K LG

JAMMU, 17 FEB

In light of recent incidents of cross-border firing and an IED attack along the Line of Control (LoC), Jammu and Kashmir's Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha affirmed that the Indian Army is fully equipped to handle any situation at the borders. He stated that the army is providing an apt response to enemy forces.

Sinha's remarks came during a sports event, where he addressed concerns following the fatal attack on two army personnel, including a captain, in the Akhnoor sector on 11 February. He confirmed that two other personnel were injured in separate incidents of cross-border firing in Rajouri and Poonch, while one was harmed by a landmine explosion. *—PTI*

JOY IN THE AIR

A heap of colourful plastic balls being taken on a two-wheeler for sale in Bengaluru
PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD

ISIL unable to mount attacks in India: UN report

Terror group Islamic State was unable to mount large-scale attacks in India but its handlers tried to incite lone-actor attacks through supporters based in the country, a UN report said.

According to the 35th report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities, these terror groups and affiliates remained resilient and adaptable to external pressure.

Aided by less centralised organisational structures, the threat they posed remained undiminished.

Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) is a terrorist group that aims to establish a caliphate in West Asia.

"ISIL was unable to mount large-scale attacks in India. However, its handlers tried to incite lone-actor attacks through India-based supporters. The pro-ISIL Al-Jauhar Media continued to spread anti-India propaganda through its publication Serat ul-Haq," the report said.

The report also added that with over two dozen terrorist groups operating in Afghanistan, UN member states assessed the security threat emanating from the country as a continuing driver of instability in the region and beyond.

"Despite the loss of territory and attrition among senior and mid-tier leadership figures, the presence of terrorist organisations in Afghanistan posed a serious challenge to the stability of the country, as well as to the security of central Asian and other neighbouring States," it said.

Despite steady progress by member states and international partners in targeting ISIL leadership and financial operations, the group continues to demonstrate resilience and adapt its modus operandi, report said.

"The situation in Afghanistan remains concerning, with Islamic State – Khorasan Province (ISIL-K) continuing to represent a threat not only to the country but also to the region and beyond," UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said in his report.

The Islamic State of Iraq and Levant has adapted to international pressure. It operates from Afghanistan, along with an expanding Al-Qaida and Tehrik-i-Taliban ***PHOTO: PTI***

The Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team report further said that notwithstanding the measures taken by the Taliban to counter ISIL-K, the group represented the most serious threat to in Afghanistan.

"The sustained presence of ISIL-K and its activity in the country reflected the group's ideological commitment to its own brand, portraying itself as advancing the wider Khorasan, its ability to leverage relationships with particular communities and the Taliban's ineffective efforts to eliminate it," the report said.

ISIL-K benefited from the Taliban's inability to protect itself against infiltration and corruption among its own ranks.

ISIL-K continued to build its capabilities to threaten Central Asian countries from northern Afghanistan. Previous terrorist attacks in Iran and Russia indicated the focus of ISIL in the region and beyond, the report said.

The report said that ISIL-K maintained a presence across the central and south Asia region, while Afghanistan remained the main hub for its recruitment and facilitation.

The report added that Al-Qaida in Afghanistan sought to strengthen cooperation with regional terrorist organisations of non-Afghan origin that operate in the country.

"The Taliban maintained a permissive environment allowing Al-Qaida to consolidate," the report said.

The Taliban also continued to provide Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) with logistical and operational space and financial support, with one Member State noting that the family of Noor Wali Masoud received a monthly payment of 3 million Afghanis (roughly USD 43,000).

TTP established new training centres in several provinces while enhancing recruitment within TTP cadres, including from the Afghan Taliban.

There was increased collaboration between TTP, the Afghan Taliban and Al-Qaida in the Indian Subcontinent, conducting attacks under the banner of Tehrik-e Jihad Pakistan, it said.

"Greater facilitation among these groups of suicide bombers and fighters and ideological guidance might transform into an extra-regional threat and an umbrella organization for other terrorist groups" the report said. *—PTI*

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

SALAR سالار

Arms-for-minerals deal raises questions in Ukraine

Ukraine boasts vast reserves of ilmenite — a key element used to produce titanium — in the heavy mineral sands that stretch for miles along the country's embattled east.

Much of it, as with all of Ukraine's critical minerals industry, is underdeveloped because of war as well as onerous state policies.

That is poised to change if US President Donald Trump's administration agrees to a deal with Ukraine to exchange critical minerals for continued American military aid.

In the central region of Kirovohrad, the ilmenite open-pit mine is a canyon of precious deposits that its owner is keen to develop with US companies. But many unknowns stand in the way of turning these riches into profit.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said at the Munich Security Conference that he did not permit his ministers to sign a mineral resource agreement with the US because the current administration is not "ready to protect us, our interests."

Ukrainian businessmen with knowledge of the minerals industry also privately expressed scepticism about whether a deal is viable.

The capital-intensive industry is unlikely to yield results in years, if not decades, as geological data is either limited or classified. Many question what conditions American companies are willing to risk to build up the industry and whether existing Ukrainian policies that have so far deterred local businessmen will accommodate foreign investors.

"The main thing we can gain is certain security guarantees obtained through economic means, so that someone stronger than us has an interest in protecting us," said Andriy Brodsky, CEO of Velta, a leading titanium mining company in Ukraine.

A deal, which would essentially barter one resource for another, could help strengthen Kyiv's relationship with the Trump administration.

The United States is a major consumer of critical raw earth minerals such as lithium and gallium, two elements that Ukraine has in reserves.

Titanium, used in aerospace, defence and industry, is also high in demand and the US is a leading importer of ilmenite. Sourcing the minerals from Ukraine would reduce future reliance on Russia and China.

In exchange, Kyiv would continue to receive a steady stream of American weaponry that offers leverage against Moscow and without which Ukraine cannot ward off future Russian aggression in the event of a ceasefire.

The question of security guarantees is a sticking point for companies. A senior Ukrainian official, speaking anonymously to describe private conversations, told the AP that US companies expressed interest in investing but needed to ensure their billions will be safeguarded in the event of renewed conflict.

"If this process starts, it will continue," Brodsky said. "Once the investment figures exceed hundreds of billions, the Americans will protect their profits. They will protect what they consider theirs."

Brodsky, who just returned from Washington and New York, said the conversation among US businesses is changing in Kyiv's favour.

"A lot of people in very serious and wealthy offices are saying that now we are in the right place," he said.

At the extraction site, the air is dense with ilmenite dust. Soot covers the faces of workers who spend hours inside every day extracting the precious material from sand. Workers are used to getting wet and don't bat an eye. Titanium is developed from the purified ilmenite at a different facility.

The deal also does not factor in a crucial element: The position of Ukrainian people. According to the Constitution, the subsoil where extraction would take place belongs to Ukraine.

"I am very afraid that they already had disapproving reviews, that everything is being given away. Who allowed him?" Ksenia Orynchak, director of the National Association of Extractive Industries of Ukraine said

Workers at the Velta mine echoed the sentiment. One said anonymously, "If you have a vegetable garden in your home, do you invite a foreigner to take it?"

The high risk often is a key reason that some Ukrainian businessmen privately express scepticism.

When one businessman of a major group of companies heard about deal, he said, "This is very capital intensive. Just to take ground from an open pit will cost you billions. Not millions, billions." *—PTI*

Ukrainian companies believe that they can trade minerals for American protection ***PHOTO: PTI***

Experts push to restore Syria's war-torn heritage sites

Experts are returning to Syria's war-ravaged heritage sites, hoping to lay the groundwork for restoring them and reviving tourism after nearly 14 years of war.

Once-thriving landmarks like the ancient city of Palmyra and the medieval Crusader castle of Crac des Chevaliers remain scarred by years of conflict, but local tourists are returning to the sites, and conservationists hope their historical and cultural significance will eventually draw international visitors back.

One of Syria's six UNESCO World Heritage sites, Palmyra was once a key hub to the ancient Silk Road network linking the Roman and Parthian empires to Asia. Located in the Syrian desert, it is renowned for its 2,000-year-old Roman-era ruins. It is now marked by shattered columns and damaged temples.

Before the Syrian uprising that began in 2011 and soon escalated into a brutal civil war, Palmyra was Syria's main tourist destination, attracting around 150,000 visitors monthly, Ayman Nabu, a researcher and expert in ruins told The Associated Press.

The ancient city was the capital of an Arab client state of the Roman Empire that briefly rebelled and carved out its own kingdom in the third century, led by Queen Zenobia.

In more recent times, the area had darker associations. It was home to Tadmur prison, where thousands of opponents of the Assad family's rule in Syria were reportedly tortured. The Islamic State group demolished the prison after capturing the town.

IS militants later destroyed Palmyra's historic temples of Bel and Baalshamin and the Arch of Triumph, viewing them as monuments to idolatry, and beheaded an elderly antiquities scholar who had dedicated his life to overseeing the ruins.

Between 2015 and 2017, control of Palmyra shifted between IS and the Syrian army before Assad's forces, backed by Russia and Iran-aligned militias, recaptured it. They established military bases in the neighboring town, which was left heavily damaged and largely abandoned. Fakhr al-Din al-Ma'ani Castle, a 16th-century fortress overlooking the city, was repurposed by Russian troops as a military barracks.

""The (Palmyra) museum was in a deplorable state, with missing documents and artifacts — we have no idea what happened to them," Nabu said.

At the theater, the Tetrapylon, and other ruins along the main colonnaded street, Nabu said they documented many illegal drillings revealing sculptures, as well as theft and smuggling of funerary or tomb-related sculptures in 2015 when IS had control of the site.

Syria's heritage sites were repurposed or severely damaged during its 14 years of war. Looting, combat and destruction have ravaged the sites, robbing it of its history ***PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA***

Inside the city's underground tombs, Islamic verses are scrawled on the walls, while plaster covers wall paintings, some depicting mythological themes that highlight Palmyra's deep cultural ties to the Greco-Roman world.

"Syria has a treasure of ruins," Nabu said, emphasising the need for preservation efforts. He said Syria's interim administration has decided to wait to develop a strategic plan to restore heritage sites.

Matthieu Lamarre of the UN's scientific, educational and cultural organization UNESCO, said the agency had since 2015, "remotely supported the protection of Syrian cultural heritage" through satellite analyses, reports and documentation and recommendations to local experts, but it did not conduct any work on site.

Beyond Palmyra, other historical sites bear the scars of war.

Perched on a hill, Crac des Chevaliers, a medieval castle originally built by the Romans and later expanded by the Crusaders, was heavily bombarded during the Syrian civil war.

Hazem Hanna, an architect and head of the antiquities department of Crac des Chevaliers, pointed to the collapsed columns and an entrance staircase obliterated by airstrikes. Damage from government airstrikes in 2014 destroyed much of the central courtyard and the arabesque-adorned columns, Hanna said. Some sections of it were renovated but much of the castle remains in ruins.

In Northwest Syria, more than 700 abandoned Byzantine settlements called Dead Cities, stretch across rocky hills and plains, their weathered limestone ruins featuring remnants of stone houses, basilicas, tombs and colonnaded streets. Despite partial collapse, arched doorways, intricate carvings and towering church facades endure, surrounded by olive trees that root deep into history.

Dating back to the first century, these villages once thrived on trade and agriculture. Today, some sites now shelter displaced Syrians, with stone houses repurposed as homes and barns, their walls blackened by fire and smoke. Crumbling structures suffer from poor maintenance and careless repurposing.

Looters have ravaged the ancient sites, Nabu said, leaving gaping holes in search of artifacts. Local visitors carve names and messages into centuries-old walls. Sheep enclosures dot the ruins, plastic debris blending with ancient stone.

Assad forces had established a military position in the village, subjecting the ruins to heavy shelling and gunfire. The area was then controlled by rebels, who made the area off-limits to most Syrians and international tourists, unlike Palmyra, which still saw some visitors during the war.

The Dead Cities were added to UNESCO's World Heritage List in 2011, said Nabu.

Idlib province alone hosts "over 1,000 heritage sites spanning different time periods — about a third of Syria's total ruins," he added.

"Tens of thousands" of looted artifacts remain undocumented, Nabu said. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Nine dead in latest blast of winter weather in US

LOUISVILLE, 17 FEB

Nine people have died in the recent round of harsh weather in the US, including eight in Kentucky who died as creeks swelled from heavy rain and water covered roads. Kentucky Governor Andy Beshear said on Sunday that hundreds of people stranded by flooding had to be rescued. President Donald Trump approved the state's request for a disaster declaration, authourising the Federal Emergency Management Agency to coordinate relief efforts throughout the state. Beshear said most of the deaths, including a mother and child, were caused by cars getting stuck in high water. "This is the search and rescue phase, and I am proud of all the Kentuckians that are out there responding, putting their lives on the line," he said *—PTI*

B'desh arrests 41 former cops for atrocities

DHAKA, 17 FEB

Police in Bangladesh have arrested 41 former officers who are among 1,059 ex-policemen accused of committing atrocities during the 2024 student-led movement that led to the ouster of prime minister Sheikh Hasina, officials and media reports said on Monday. Hasina, the Awami League leader, resigned and escaped to India last year after anti-discrimination students protests against the quota system turned into a movement and ousted her 16-year regime from power. 1,400 people lost their lives during the protests. Reports said surviving victims of the atroc-ities or the family members of the slain victims lodged hundreds of cases with police stations and court accusing the 1,059 officials of the main law enforcement agency. *—PTI*

S'pore Oppn leader found guilty of lying in Parliament

SINGAPORE, 17 FEB

Singapore Leader of Opposition Pritam Singh was found guilty on Monday of giving false testimony to a parliamentary committee, a verdict that could see him disqualified from Parliament and contesting a general election this year. Deputy Principal District Judge Luke Tan convicted Singh of the two charges against him. The charges against Singh relate to his handling of Raeesah Khan, a former lawmaker from his party, who lied to Parliament in a separate case. Singh was accused of giving two false answers to the Committee of Privileges during its inquiry into Khan's case on December 10 and 15, 2021. The case stems from Singh's handling of Khan's false claim in Parliament about accompanying a sexual assault victim to the police station. *—PTI*

B'deshi vessel trapped in Muriganga river

KOLKATA/DHAKA , 17 FEB

A Bangladeshi vessel carrying fly ash from Budge Budge to the neighbouring country is sinking in the Muriganga river in West Bengal's South 24 Parganas district after hitting a sandbar, an official said on Monday. The vessel will be towed to the neighbouring country after evacuation of the cargo, the official said. The Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI) said all crew members of the Bangladeshi vessel are safe. The process of evacuating the fly ash cargo is underway so that the vessel can be towed back to the neighbouring country. "The accident took place on the night of 13 February when the vessel was heading back to Bangladesh with fly ash. The evacuation process is now being carried out," IWAI said. *—PTI*

EU LEADERS HUDDLE OVER US HURDLE

Macron says the constant threats of non-cooperation from US feels like a shock

PARIS, 17 FEB

French President Emmanuel Macron called leaders from key European Union nations and the United Kingdom to his Palace on Monday for an emergency meeting on how to deal with the US, a once rock-solid partner.

The move follows a week-long diplomatic blitz on Ukraine by the Trump administration that seemed to embrace the Kremlin while it cold-shouldered many of its age-old European allies.

Despite belligerent warnings for months ahead of Donald Trump's re-election as US president, EU leaders publicly ignored the ominous forebodings and somehow hoped Trump would stand side by side with Europe, as it would finally start to act on beefing up its defences and become less reliant on the firepower of Washington.

But a flurry of speeches by Vice President JD Vance and Défense Secretary Pete Hegseth during their initial visits to Europe last week questioned Europe's security commitments and democratic principles. Macron said their stinging rebukes and threats of noncooperation in the face of military danger felt like a shock to the system.

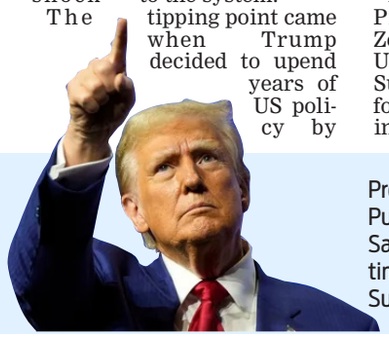
US Vice President JD Vance and Secretary of State Marco Rubio, second and third right, meet with Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, third left, in Munich, Germany, on Friday *PHOTO: AP*

The tipping point came when Trump decided to upend years of US policy by holding talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin in hopes of ending the Russia-Ukraine war. Then, Trump's special envoy for Ukraine and Russia on Saturday all but ruled out the inclusion of other Europeans in any Ukraine peace talks.

Meanwhile, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy travelled to the United Arab Emirates late Sunday as momentum grows for potential peace talks ending Moscow's war on the country.

Trump last week suggested he would be meeting Russian President Vladimir Putin in Saudi Arabia.

The UAE, home to Abu Dhabi and Dubai, long has been floated as a possible site for peace talks as well given the large population of Russian and Ukrainian expatriates who have flooded the country since the war began, and due to the Emirates' work on prisoner exchanges in the past. *—PTI*



TRUMP SAYS HE COULD MEET PUTIN 'SOON'

President Trump has said he could meet Russian President Vladimir Putin "very soon" as officials from the countries prepare to meet in Saudi Arabia for talks on ending the war in Ukraine. "There's no time set, but it could be very soon, " Trump told reporters on Sunday ahead of US Russian officials in Saudi Arabia. *—PTI*

Rubio planning talks in Saudi on Russia

WASHINGTON, 17 FEB

Marco Rubio *PHOTO: PTI*

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio is leading a delegation to Saudi Arabia for direct talks with Russian officials in the coming days to seek an end to Moscow's nearly three-year-old invasion of Ukraine, a US official said om Sunday.

Also expected to join in Riyadh is national security advisor Michael Waltz and special envoy Steve Witkoff, according to the official, who was not authorised to discuss the talks and spoke on the condition of anonymity.

The official added that what the administration sees as an early-stage negotiations remain fluid and who ultimately ends up at the table for the anticipated talks could change.

The trip follows last week's telephone call between President Donald Trump and Russian President Vla-dimir Putin in which Trump said they "agreed to have our respective teams start negotiations immediate-ly". The call upended years of US policy, ending the isolation of Moscow over the February 24, 2022, in-vasion. Trump also spoke separately with Zelenskyy.

It wasn't immediately clear if any Ukrainians would take part in the talks. A Ukrainian delegation is in Saudi Arabia to pave the way for a possible visit by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, a Ukrainian official said.

Zelenskyy has said he wouldn't accept any negotiations about Ukraine that don't include his country. *—PTI*

B'desh arrests 41 cops for force on students

DHAKA, 17 FEB

Police in Bangladesh have arrested 41 former officers who are among 1,059 ex-policemen accused of committing atrocities during the 2024 student-led movement that led to the ouster of prime minister Sheikh Hasina, officials and media reports said on Monday.

Hasina, the Awami League leader, resigned and escaped to India on August 5 last year after anti-discrimination students protests against the quota system turned into a movement and ousted her 16-year regime from power. Some 1,400 people lost their lives during the protests between July and August.

The mass circulation Prothom Alo newspaper, quoting unnamed police headquarters (PHQ) officials, said surviving victims of the atrocities or the family members of the slain victims lodged hundreds of cases with police stations and court accusing the 1,059 officials of the main law enforcement agency.

The PHQ said police's two former inspectors general (IGP) Chowdhury Abdullah Al Mamun and AKN Shahidul Haque and former police commissioners of Dhaka and the southeastern port city of Chattogram -- Mohammad Asaduzzaan and Mian Saiful Islam -- were among those who were arrested so far.

Other than Haq, these officers were serving until Hasina's departed from the country.

The highest number of 174 cases were filed against Dhaka Metropolitan Police's now fugitive former additional commissioner Harunur Rashid. *— PTI*

Balaji's cause of death was reported as a self-inflicted gunshot wound to the head *PHOTO: X*

SAN FRANCISCO COPS REJECT SUICIDE THEORY IN SUCHIR BALAJI'S DEATH

SANFARNCISO, 17 FEB

San Francisco police have concluded their investigation into the death of Suchir Balaji, an Indian-origin software developer who worked at OpenAI. While his parents suspected foul play, prompting an investi-gation, police have reaffirmed their initial finding of suicide. A joint four-page report from the police and medical examiners, along with a separate 13-page report from the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME), confirms this conclusion. The OCME report stated Balaji's cause of death was a self-inflicted gunshot wound to the head, and the police investigation found no evidence of homicide. Balaji was found dead in his apartment on November 26 with a gunshot wound. Authorities reported no other injuries, no signs of forced entry, and noted that Balaji's computer contained searches related to brain anatomy. The gun used belonged to Balaji, and gunshot residue was found on his hands. *—PTI*

US to bring back fired nuclear weapons workers

WASHINGTON, 17 FEB

The US has halted the firings of of federal employees who were tasked with working on the nation's nuclear weapons programmes, in an about-face that has left workers confused and experts cautioning that DOGE's blind cost cutting will put communities at risk.

Three US officials who spoke to AP said up to 350 employees at the National Nuclear Security Administration were abruptly laid off late on Thursday, with some losing access to email before they'd learned they were fired, only to try to enter their offices on Friday morning to find they were locked out. The offi-cials spoke on the condition of anonymity for fear of retaliation.

Elon Musk listens as President Donald Trump speaks with reporters in the Oval Office at the White House *PHOTO: X*

One of the hardest hit offices was the Pantex Plant near Amarillo, Texas, which saw about 30 per cent of the cuts. Those employees work on reassembling warheads, one of the most sensitive jobs across the nuclear weapons enterprise, with the highest levels of clearance.

The hundreds let go at NNSA were part of a DOGE purge across the Department of Energy that targeted about 2,000 employees. *—PTI*

US says it killed al-Qaeda top official in Syria

WASHINGTON, 17 FEB

The US military has said that it conducted a precision airstrike in northwest Syria on Saturday, killing a senior finance and logistics official of Hurras al-Din (HaD), an Al-Qaeda affiliate.

US Central Command said the strike aimed to disrupt terrorist attack planning against US and allied personnel and civilians. This follows a similar strike on 30 January, which killed another senior HaD operative, Muhammad Salah al-Zabir. HaD, designated a terrorist organization by the US in 2019, was founded in 2018 and only recently confirmed its allegiance to Al-Qaeda before its reported dissolu-tion last month, according to SITE Intelligence Group. *—Agencies*

Trump wants to fire whistleblower agency

The Trump administration wants the Supreme Court to permit the firing of the head of the federal agency dedicated to protecting whistleblowers, according to documents obtained Sunday that would mark the first appeal to the justices since President Donald Trump took office. *—PTI*

SA NGOs worry about HIV patients' treatment

Millions in South Africa are affected by Trump's global foreign aid freeze, raising worries about HIV patients defaulting on treatment, infection rates going up and eventually a rise in deaths. In 2024, KwaZulu-Natal province recorded the second-highest HIV prevalence in the country. *—PTI*

China urges US to set itself right on Taiwan freedom

China on Monday urged US to "correct its mistakes" after it removed previous wording on its website regarding Taiwan independence, describing the change as a routine update. The updated Taiwan fact sheet, however, still maintains Washington's opposition to any roads. *—PTI*

Israel backs Trump plan for Palestinians

JERUSALEM, 17 FEB

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has signalled that he was moving ahead with US President Donald Trump's proposal to transfer the Palestinian population out of Gaza, calling it "the only viable plan to enable a different future" for the region.

Netanyahu discussed the plan with US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, who kicked off a Middle East visit by endorsing Israel's war aims in Gaza, saying Hamas "must be eradicated". That created further doubt around the shaky ceasefire as talks on its second phase are yet to begin.

Rubio, in his upcoming stops in Saudi Arabia and the UAE, is likely to face more push-back from Arab leaders over Trump's proposal, which includes redeveloping Gaza under US ownership. Netanyahu has said all emigration from Gaza should be "voluntary" but rights groups and other critics say that the plan amounts to coercion given the territory's vast destruction. *—PTI*

Taliban visits Japan

KABUL, 17 FEB

A Taliban delegation has arrived in Japan on what is the first visit by the group that rules Afghanistan, according to media in the East Asian country.

The delegation, consisting of foreign affairs, education, economy and health officials, arrived on Sunday for a week-long visit, the Asahi Shimbun newspaper reported.

The visit is a rarity for the Taliban, whose diplomatic trips have previously remained close to Afghanistan since regaining power in 2021. *—PTI*

IN THE LIMELIGHT

Conclave and The Brutalist win top prizes at Bafta film awards

Best Film & Outstanding British Film: **CONCLAVE**

Lead Actor: **ADRIEN BRODY** (The Brutalist)

Lead Actress: **MIKEY MADISON** (Anora)

- Supporting Actress: **Zoe Saldaña** (Emilia Pérez)
- Supporting Actor: **Kieran Culkin** (A Real Pain)
- Best Director: **Brady Corbet** (The Brutalist)
- Film Not in the English Language: **Emilia Pérez**
- Animated Film: **Wallance and Gromit: Vls Trumo pro-'Russia?**
- Original Screenplay: **A Real Pain**
- Original Score: **The Brutalist** (Daniel Blumberg)
- Cinematography: **The Brutalist**
- Costume Design: **Wicked**
- Special Visual Effects: **Dune: Part Two**

'All We Imagine As Light' loses Best Film Not in English Language to French title 'Emilia Perez'

DeepSeek stalls downloads of AI apps in South Korea

SEOUL, 17 FEB

PHOTO: X

DeepSeek, a Chinese artificial intelligence startup, has temporarily paused downloads of its chatbot apps in South Korea while it works with local authorities to address privacy concerns, according to South Ko-rean officials on Monday. South Korea's Personal Information Protection Commission said DeepSeek's apps were removed from the local versions of Apple's App Store and Google Play on Saturday evening and that the company agreed to work with the agency to strengthen privacy protections before re-launching the apps. The action does not affect users who have already downloaded DeekSeek on their phones or use it on personal computers. Nam Seok, director of the South Korean commission's investiga-tion division, advised South Korean users of DeepSeek to delete the app from their devices or avoid en-tering personal information into the tool until the issues are resolved.

Many South Korean government agencies and companies have either blocked DeepSeek from their net-works or prohibited employees from using the app for work, amid worries that the AI model was gather-ing too much sensitive information. *—PTI*

Gold retreats from all-time high, down by ₹1,200

MUMBAI, 17 FEB

Gold prices retreated from all-time level in the national capital on Monday, with the precious metal declining Rs 1,200 to Rs 88,200 per 10 grams due to emergence of fresh selling from stockists and retailers. According to the All India Sarafa Association, the yellow metal of 99.9 per cent purity had soared Rs 1,300 to hit an all-time high of Rs 89,400 per 10 grams on Friday. Gold of 99.5 per cent purity pulled back from its record level and depreciated Rs 1,200 to Rs 87,800 per 10 grams. It closed at Rs 89,000 per 10 grams in the previous trading close. Silver prices also faced selling pressure and slipped below the Rs 1 lakh-mark by losing Rs 1,800 to Rs 98,200 per kg on Monday. *—PTI*

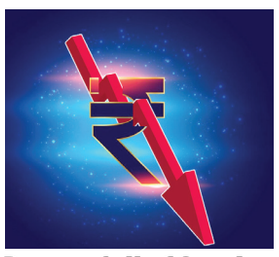


PHOTO: FREEPIK

Rupee falls 16 paise to close at 86.87 against US dollar

MUMBAI, 17 FEB

The rupee depreciated 16 paise to close at 86.87 (provisional) against the US dollar on Monday, weighed down by significant foreign fund outflows and a recovery in the US dollar index from intraday lows. Forex traders said the Indian rupee is trading with a negative bias as foreign banks went on a dollar-buying spree and importers scrambled to secure dollars, as they feared further depreciation amid global uncertainty. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 86.70 and touched the high of 86.68 against the greenback during intraday. It also touched the low of 86.88 before ending the session at 86.87 (provisional) against the dollar, logging a loss of 16 paise from its previous close. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.14 per cent higher at 106.85. *—PTI*

UFlex to invest ₹750 cr on new unit in Mexico

NEW DELHI, 17 FEB

Flexible packaging and solutions firm UFlex Ltd is investing over Rs 750 crore to set up a woven polypropylene bags manufacturing plant in Mexico and a new recycling facility at Noida, to be operational in 2025-26, according to its Chairman and Managing Director Ashok Chaturvedi. The company's board had approved setting up of the woven polypropylene bags (WPP) manufacturing plant in Mexico at an investment of USD 50 million (nearly Rs 435 crore) to cater to North and South American pet food market, along with the recycling unit at Noida a an investment of Rs 317.11 crore last week. The plant in Mexico will have a capacity of 80 million bags per annum and the capacity will be added in the financial year 2025-26, the company said. *—PTI*

JSW MG Motor names Anurag Mehrotra as MD

NEW DELHI, 17 FEB

JSW MG Motor India on Monday said it has appointed Anurag Mehrotra as the Managing Director of the company. Mehrotra has three decades of professional experience and has held key leadership roles in the automotive sector's sales, marketing, strategy, and business development. His previous roles include Vice President of Strategy & International Business at Tata Motors Commercial Vehicles and President & Managing Director at Ford India. JSW MG Motor India CEO Emeritus Rajeev Chaba will continue to advise management and shareholders as a member of the Joint Steering Committee, the company said. *—PTI*

Mkts end eight-day losing run on buying in RIL, HDFC

Sensex climbs 57.65 points, Nifty rebounds 30.25 points

MUMBAI, 17 FEB

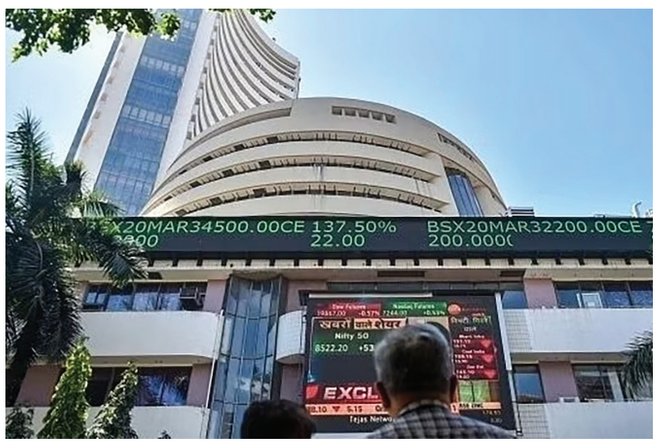
Stock markets snapped the eight-day losing run on Monday with benchmark Sensex closing higher by 57 points on the back of value buying in blue-chip stocks HDFC Bank and Reliance Industries.

Helped by fag-end buying, the 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 57.65 points or 0.08 per cent to settle at 75,996.86. During the day, the barometer tanked 644.45 points or 0.84 per cent to 75,294.76.

The NSE Nifty rebounded 30.25 points or 0.13 per cent to 22,959.50.

From the 30-share blue-chip pack, Bajaj Finserv, Power Grid, IndusInd Bank, Adani Ports, UltraTech Cement, HDFC Bank, Zomato and Tata Motors were among the major gainers.

Mahindra & Mahindra, Bharti Airtel, Tata Consultancy Services, Infosys, ICICI Bank, and ITC were the biggest laggards.



In the last eight trading days, the BSE benchmark tanked 2,644.6 points, and Nifty slumped 810 points or 3.41 per cent **PHOTO: PTI**

Foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 4,294.69 crore on Friday, according to exchange data.

The total outflow by FPIs has reached Rs 99,299 crore -- near Rs 1 lakh crore -- in 2025 so far, data with the depositories showed. FPIs pulled out Rs 21,272 crore in the first two weeks of this month, driven by global tensions after the US imposed tariffs on imports. This came following a net outflow of Rs 78,027 crore in January.

In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo and Shanghai settled in the positive territory while Hong Kong ended lower.

European markets were trading higher. US markets ended mostly lower on Friday.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.21 per cent higher at USD 74.90 a barrel.

The BSE benchmark dropped 199.76 points or 0.26 per cent to settle at 75,939.21 on Friday. The Nifty declined 102.15 points or 0.44 per cent to 22,929.25.

In the last eight trading days, the BSE benchmark tanked 2,644.6 points or 3.36 per cent, and the Nifty slumped 810 points or 3.41 per cent. *—PTI*

TRADE DEFICIT HITS $23B

India's exports drop 2.38% in Jan

NEW DELHI, 17 FEB

PHOTO: PTI

India's exports declined for the third month in a row in January by 2.38 per cent to USD 37.32 billion due to volatility in petroleum prices and global uncertainties.

The trade deficit widened to USD 222.99 billion as imports rose by 10.28 per cent year-on-year to USD 59.42 billion in January, according to the Commerce Ministry data.

Cumulatively, during April-January this fiscal, exports rose by 1.39 per cent to USD 358.91 billion and imports by 7.43 per cent to USD 601.9 billion.

Trade deficit, the difference between imports and exports, during the ten-month period widened to USD 242.99 billion.

While the deficit was USD 21.94 billion in December and USD 16.55 billion in January last year.

Commerce Secretary Sunil Barthwal told reporters that despite economic uncertainties in the world, India's exports are doing better in both goods and services sectors.

It was USD 778 billion in 2023-24.

In January, the country's gold imports rose to USD 2.68 billion from USD 1.9 billion in the same month last year. It was USD 4.7 billion in December 2024.

Crude oil imports fell to USD 13.43 billion from USD 16.56 billion in January 2024. It was USD 15.27 billion in December 2024. *—PTI*

India delivering good returns on investments: Sitharaman

MUMBAI, 17 FEB

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Monday said India is delivering good returns to investors who are booking profits.

Replying to a question on selling by foreign institutional investors (FIIs), Sitharaman said India has an environment where investments are yielding good returns.

Finance Secretary Tuhin Kanta Pandey added that in times of global volatilities like the one that is being witnessed, the FIIs tend to go back to their country of origin which is mostly the US.

He said India is the fastest growing major economy and will continue to grow going ahead as well.

To a question on inflation, Sitharaman said the government's supply measures and the Reserve Bank's demand-side initiatives are working in tandem to control price rise.

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman with Minister of State Pankaj Chaudhary and Finance Secretary Tuhin Kanta Pandey addresses a press conference, in Mumbai **PHOTO: PTI**

Meanwhile, the Department of Financial Services Secretary M Nagaraju said the government is "actively considering" raising the Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation (DICGC) cover beyond Rs 5 lakh. *—PTI*

IL&FS initiates £5000M interim payout to creditors

NEW DELHI, 17 FEB

The IL&FS Group has commenced an interim payout of £5000 million to eligible creditors as part of ongoing resolution efforts. Following this distribution, the total debt discharged will rise to approximately £43,000 million, representing over 70 per cent of the estimated total debt resolution target of £61,000 million.

The interim distribution involves £3500 million in units of Infrastructure Investment Trust (InvIT) and £1500 million in cash, primarily initiated by three holding companies: Infrastructure Leasing and Financial Services (IL&FS), IL&FS Financial Services (IFIN), and IL&FS Transportation Networks (ITNL), which collectively account for the majority of the Group's debt. *—PTI*

India's sugar production to fall below 27 MMT

NEW DELHI, 17 FEB

India's sugar production for the 2025 sugar season is projected to fall below 27 million metric tons (MMT), down from 31.8 MMT the previous year, according to a report from Centrum. As of February 15, 2025, production stands at 19.77 MMT, marking a 12 per cent decrease compared to the same period last year. This decline is attributed to higher quantities of sugar being diverted for ethanol production, reduced cane availability, and lower recovery levels.

Maharashtra has been particularly hard hit, experiencing a 14 per cent year-on-year drop in sugar production, while Karnataka and Uttar Pradesh have seen decreases of 13 per cent and 8 per cent respectively. In Karnataka, cane availability has plunged by 22 per cent in recent weeks, sharply impacting crushing volumes. Meanwhile, Maharashtra's cane availability is down by 7.8 per cent, whereas Uttar Pradesh's supply has slightly increased by 1.4 per cent.

The decrease in cane supply has led to an alarming rise in the number of mills suspending operations, from 23 on January 31 to 51 by mid-February. Total sugarcane crushing for the season has dipped to 218 MMT, down 4.5 per cent from 228 MMT last year. Despite this decline, sugar prices remain robust. *—ANI*

'AI investments set to increase in IT services'

NEW DELHI, 17 FEB

The adoption of artificial intelligence (AI) in the IT services sector is accelerating as enterprises transition from proof-of-concept projects to comprehensive implementations, according to a report by ICICI Securities. Major cloud service providers, or hyperscalers, are responding to this surge in demand for AI-driven solutions by committing to significant capital expenditures.

Tech giants like Microsoft, AWS, and Google are leading the charge with substantial investments to enhance their AI and cloud infrastructure. AWS reported a capital expenditure of USD 26.3 billion in the last quarter of 2024, with plans to sustain similar spending throughout 2025. Microsoft followed suit with a capex of USD 22.6 billion, anticipating continued strong investments in AI.

Google plans to invest USD 75 billion in 2025, focusing on AI services and data centres to bolster its initiatives like Google Cloud and Google DeepMind. Hyperscalers are also working to reduce AI consumption costs through improved software efficiency.

IT services firms are experiencing heightened demand for AI-driven solutions, with TCS and Infosys ramping up their AI and GenAI deployments. *—ANI*

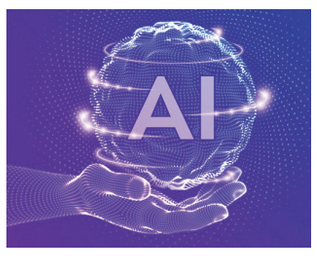


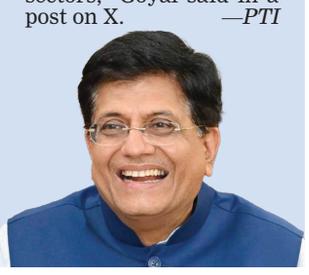
PHOTO:FREEPIK

- Google plans to invest USD 75 billion in 2025, focusing on AI services and data centres to bolster its initiatives like Google Cloud and Google DeepMind

Goyal discusses aircraft mfg with Lockheed Martin

NEW DELHI, 17 FEB

Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal on Monday held discussions with US defence major Lockheed Martin on opportunities for manufacturing aircraft in India. He held a meeting with a delegation led by Michael Williamson, President at Lockheed Martin International. "Explored opportunities for manufacturing aircraft in India to further strengthen the 'Make in India' initiative in the aerospace and defence sectors," Goyal said in a post on X. *—PTI*



Bajaj Consumer Care to acquire Vishal Personal Care for ₹108 cr

NEW DELHI, 17 FEB

Bajaj Consumer Care Ltd (BCCL) has announced its acquisition of Vishal Personal Care, the owner of the renowned hair and skin care brand Banjara's, for an enterprise value of Rs 108.3 crore. This strategic move aims to bolster BCCL's presence in the competitive South Indian market.

The acquisition, approved by BCCL's board in a meeting last Friday, will be executed in two stages: an initial 49 per cent stake will be acquired, followed by the remaining 51 per cent in the second tranche. The total estimated transaction value stands at Rs 120 crore, underscoring BCCL's commitment to expanding its market footprint.

Founded in Hyderabad in 1991, Vishal Personal Care boasts a diverse product portfolio that includes facial kits, herbal powders, aloe vera gels, shampoos, and hair care powders, with its products available in over 70,000 retail outlets across South India.

PHOTO: X

- The acquisition, approved by BCCL's board in a meeting last Friday, will be executed in two stages: an initial 49% stake will be acquired, followed by 51%

According to BCCL, this acquisition will enable the company to capitalise on Vishal's extensive distribution network, enhancing its reach not only in the southern markets but also in Hindi-speaking regions by introducing Banjara's products.

BCCL Managing Director Jaideep Nandi stated that this acquisition represents a significant step in fortifying the company's presence across five southern states, while complementing its existing product range. *—PTI*

AHEAD OF APPLE, NIKE

Reliance ranks 2nd globally on FutureBrand Index 2024

NEW DELHI, 17 FEB

India's largest and most valuable company Reliance Industries Ltd has been ranked the second best brand globally on the FutureBrand Index for 2024, ahead of brands like Apple and Nike.

The ranking highlights brands that continuously evolve strategies to deliver on both brand purpose and experience, staying ahead of market shifts.

Reliance jumped 11 places in the latest ranking, according to the ranking released by FutureBrand.

The company was ranked at 13th place in 2023 and is ranked at 2nd in the latest ranking.

The list is led by Korean brand Samsung. Reliance ranks ahead of well-known global brands like Apple, Nike, Walt Disney, Netflix, Microsoft, Intel and Toyota.

Reliance is the only Indian brand on the list.

The FutureBrand Index evaluates the PwC Top 100 companies by market capitalisation from a brand perception strength perspective.

The FutureBrand Index is an annual study that reorders the top 100 global companies by market capitalisation, based on their brand perception. It assesses how well these companies balance 18 attributes across Purpose and Experience to position themselves for future success.

Unlike traditional rankings focused purely on financial performance, the FutureBrand Index delves into how brands are perceived by informed professionals. *—PTI*

PHOTO:FREEPIK

FBI GLOBAL RANKING 2024

RANK	COMPANY	SECTOR
1	SAMSUNG	Information Technology
2	RELIANCE	Energy
3	APPLE	Information Technology
4	NIKE	Consumer Discretionary
5	ASML	Information Technology
6	DANAHER	Healthcare
7	THE WALT DISNEY COMPANY	Communication Services
8	NESTLÉ	Consumer Staples
9	ALPHABET (GOOGLE)	Information Technology
10	IHC	Industrials

India hope for Shami's magic to reclaim CT

India start their Champions Trophy campaign on 20 February against Bangladesh in Dubai

BENGALURU, 17 FEB

Mohammed Shami's right hand has more sleight than a magician. A simple cock of his wrist can outfox the best batters in the world. But can he unlock the sorcery and help India reclaim the ICC Champions Trophy after 12 years?

The fans will certainly expect Shami to hit his strides straightaway in the marquee event because India's primary strike weapon Jasprit Bumrah has been ruled out due to an injury.

But there are multiple concerns as well about Shami's readiness for an event of this magnitude. India start their Champions Trophy campaign on February 20 against Bangladesh in Dubai.

Right-arm fast bowler Mohammed Shami **PHOTO: PTI**

The 34-year-old is coming back from an injury. Even though he has played a few matches at various levels and formats since his re-entry into cricket late last year, delivering in a high-pressure tournament is an altogether different proposition.

Bumrah's absence has given Bangladesh glimmer of hope

—Imrul Kayes, Ex-Bangladesh opener

Another reason for the trepidation surrounding Shami is the absence of Bumrah, his trusted ally in the last six years or so at the other end.

In the Champions Trophy, Shami is all set to partner Arshdeep Singh. But for all his skills and promise, Arshdeep is not yet at Bumrah's level.

So, can Shami drag the train forward all by himself?

Former India pacer Laxmipathy Balaji found no reason to believe otherwise.

"Actually, he had out-bowled Bumrah in the 2019 (50-over World Cup) and in the last World Cup (2023). Bumrah is the champion bowler across formats. But Shami has experience and, before Bumrah's arrival, it was Shami who carried India's attack all through," Balaji, now a reputed pace bowling coach, told PTI.

Bumrah's unavailability makes it imperative for Shami to strike upfront consistently. Balaji underlined that factor. —*PTI*

RAHANE SLAMS BCCI AFTER TEST SNUB

Former India vice-captain Ajinkya Rahane has expressed disappointment over his abrupt exclusion from the national team, revealing that no communication took place between him and the selectors after the 2023 World Test Championship final. Rahane, once a crucial middle-order batter, admitted he expected a recall for the South Africa series, given his contributions in domestic cricket and IPL. However, he was overlooked without any explanation. "I'm not someone who goes and asks why I was dropped. Many told me to talk, but you can only talk if the other person is ready," Rahane told. The veteran batter also noted how PR plays role in selections. —*Agencies*

National Para Athletics C'ship begins in Chennai

CHENNAI, 17 FEB

Nearly 1,500 para-athletes from across India will showcase their skills when the 23rd National Para Athletics Championship begins at Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium here on Tuesday. This historic event, marking Chennai's first-ever hosting of the championship, will feature a record 1,476 para-athletes competing in 155 events by 30 teams, making it one of the largest para-athletics gatherings in the country. Among the prominent athletes set to participate are Sumit Antil (Javelin), Manoj Sabapathy (Wheelchair Racing), Manoj Singaraj (Shot Put), Mariyappan Thangavelu (High Jump), Muthu Raja (Shot Put), Hokato Sema (Shot Put), Navdeep Singh (Javelin), and Yogesh Kathuniya (Discus), among others. —*PTI*

PHOTO:X

Khelo India postponed due to insufficient snow

GULMARG, 17 FEB

The second leg of the 5th Khelo India Winter Games, scheduled to begin here on Saturday, has been postponed due to insufficient snowfall in the region. The new dates for the event will be announced once the weather improves and a fresh assessment is completed. "The Jammu and Kashmir leg of the Khelo India Winter Games has been postponed," a sports ministry source told PTI. Gulmarg was scheduled to hold the snow events, including alpine skiing, nordic skiing, ski mountaineering, and snowboarding. Leh hosted the the first phase of the Games in which ice events (hockey and skating) took place from 23 to 27 January. —*PTI*

Spanish league match interrupted amid racist chants

MADRID, 17 FEB

Athletic Bilbao's game at Espanyol was briefly interrupted because of fans' racist chants. The referee activated the anti-racism protocol and stopped the Spanish league match in Barcelona about 20 minutes into the first half. Athletic forward Iñaki Williams denounced the chants afterward, saying they were targeted at his teammate Maroan Sannadi. Williams has previously been subjected to racist chants at Espanyol. The interruption lasted about three minutes and a message was broadcast to fans reminding them about punishment under the law for such chants. The game ended 1-1, with Oihan Sancet scoring the equalizer in the 77th after Roberto Fernández put the hosts ahead in the 62nd. The Spanish league is expected to investigate the chants, with Espanyol facing a possible punishment. —*PTI*

Tour de France champion, Geraint Thomas to retire

LONDON, 17 FEB

Geraint Thomas, the former Tour de France champion who also won gold medals in track cycling for Great Britain at the Olympic Games in 2008 and '12, announced Monday that this will be his final year as a professional. Thomas, a loyal teammate with a tremendous appetite for victory who transformed into a leader in his own right over his almost two-decade career, said he will focus on the Tour this summer with Ineos Grenadiers. Growing up on the outskirts of Cardiff, Wales, Thomas started bike racing at 10, and his exceptional qualities did not remain unnoticed for long. Thomas had already showed immense skills on the road from winning Paris-Roubaix junior race in 2004.—*PTI*

Naqvi sells VIP tickets, chooses stands

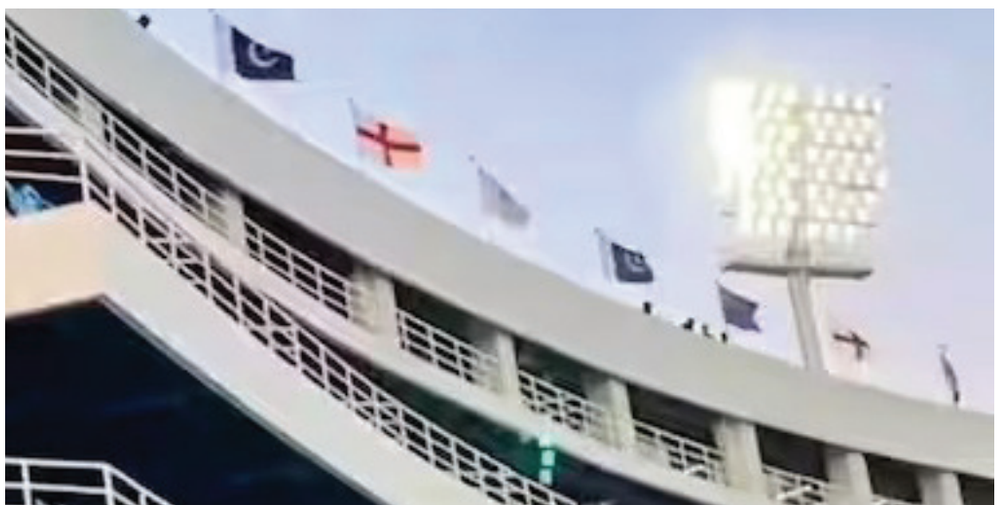
KARACHI, 17 FEB

- He chose to sell the box and watch the game, including the game against India, from regular enclosures to experience the atmosphere with the fans

Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) chairman Mohsin Naqvi has decided to watch the Champions Trophy match against India from the stands, after selling the 30-seat VIP Hospitality Box offered to him for around 400,000 dirhams, and putting the proceeds into the PCB's coffers.

According to a report in Pakistan media, Naqvi was offered the premium seating for himself, his family, and guests for the matches in Dubai. However, he chose to sell the box and watch the game, including the game against India, from regular enclosures to experience the atmosphere with the fans. Naqvi apparently has informed the ICC and Emirates Cricket Board that he will watch the match with the crowd. —*PTI*

ANOTHER CONTROVERSY



A video from Pakistan's National Stadium in Karachi, showing the absence of the Indian flag among the participating nations' flags ahead of the ICC Champions Trophy, has sparked controversy. Widely shared on social media, the footage left fans stunned and fueled heated debates, with many speculating that India's decision to play all its matches in Dubai could be the reason **PHOTO: X**

LEGENDS TOUR

Jeev registers top-20 finish in Staysure Marbella

MARBELLA, 17 FEB

- Jeev shot a final round of 71 with four birdies, one bogey and a double bogey for a total of 3-under for 54 holes to finish T-19th on Sunday. His first two rounds were 68-73

Veteran India golfer Jeev Milkha Singh overcame a double bogey to finish in the top-20 at the Marbella Staysure event on the 2025 Legends Tour here.

Jeev shot a final round of 71 with four birdies, one bogey and a double bogey for a total of 3-under for 54 holes to finish T-19th on Sunday. His first two rounds were 68-73.

It was the opening event of the season on the Legends Tour and Jeev had finished T-28 in Trophy Hassan II on the Champions Tour PGA.

Simon Griffiths produced another hugely impressive performance to win the opening event of the 2025 Legends Tour season with a 15-under total, holding off Colin Montgomerie, Miguel Angel Jimenez, Stephen Gallacher and Scott Hend in the final round.

Griffiths started the day with a two-shot lead and picked up birdies at the first and eighth to maintain the advantage heading into the back nine.

While many of the chasers struggled to mount a serious charge on the way home, Griffiths pulled away with further red numbers at the 10th, 12th and 15th. A closing bogey didn't matter as the 51-year-old made a perfect start to the new season.

Jimenez was joined on -10 by debutant Matthew Cort, 2023 Legends Tour number one Peter Baker and Q School graduate Lionel Alexandre, who shot rounds of 68, 69 and 70, respectively. —*PTI*

Neymar scores his 1st goal on Santos return

SAO PAULO, 17 FEB

Neymar scored his first goal for Santos since returning to Brazil when he converted a penalty Sunday in a 3-1 win over Sao Paulo-based Água Santa.

Finding the net from the spot in the 14th minute of the Sao Paulo state championship match will provide the 33-year-old star some relief after a tough restart.

Thaciano in the 26th and Guilherme, with an assist by Neymar, in the 70th rounded out the scoring for Santos.

So far, Neymar has not managed to play all 90 minutes in a match for Santos. His performances were below par in the first three games for the club, but he showed some improvement on Sunday as he continues his recovery from a knee injury.

Neymar officially returned to soccer in October after an entire year out.

He confirmed last month that his contract with Saudi club Al-Hilal had been terminated by mutual consent. He had an injury-marred spell at Al-Hilal, where he played only seven matches and scored once.

Neymar has signed a six-month contract with Santos, which he said could be extended later.

In his first professional spell at Santos from 2009 to 2013, he scored 138 goals in 225 official matches.

The Brazilian became the most expensive player in soccer history when he transferred from Barcelona to PSG for 222 million euros (then $262 million) in 2017. —*PTI*

Man U Ruben says 'job is so hard' after latest loss

MANCHESTER, 17 FEB

Ruben Amorim has opened up on "a lot of problems" at Manchester United, but says he's not worried about himself after his troubled team lost again.

"I am not worried about me, I'm worried about the club, the team, the players," Amorim said. "I hate to lose, that feeling is the worst. The rest I am not thinking about." Amorim said he just wants "to help my players."

United lost 1-0 to Tottenham on Sunday to leave the 20-time champion 15th in the Premier League. It was the ninth defeat for Amorim since he took over as United manager in November.

The last time United lost 12 of its first 25 games in a league season was in the 1973-74 campaign when it was relegated from the top flight. —*PTI*

Juventus crushes Inter's dreams

MILAN, 17 FEB

Defending champion Inter Milan missed its chance to move top of Serie A after losing 1-0 at Juventus, which boosted its hopes of a top-four finish.

Francisco Conceição scored the only goal in the 74th minute of a high-tempo Derby d'Italia, or Italy's derby as matches between the two fierce rivals have come to be known.

Inter wasted a number of chances and remained two points behind league leader Napoli, which was held to a 2-2 draw at Lazio on Saturday. Juventus is fourth.

Inter visits Napoli in a potential title-deciding match in two weeks. "We'll try to do our best, or at least better than tonight," Inzaghi said. —*PTI*

Malewar, Shorey power Vidarbha to 308/5

NAGPUR, 17 FEB

Danish Malewar's gritty 79 and opener Dhruv Shorey's attractive 74 made up for a gritty batting show by hosts Vidarbha as they reached 308 for 5 against defending champions Mumbai on the first day of their Ranji Trophy semi-final here on Monday.

Karun Nair, who is back in contention for a Test team berth, scored a chiselled 45 before he seemed distinctly unhappy with a caught behind decision of Shivam Dube's bowling although he had opted for DRS.

PHOTO:INSTAGRAM

While the two-time champions didn't have a big partnership, they had enough middling stands to see them cross 300-run mark after Mumbai had sent down 88 overs in the day.

Mumbai bowlers were also guilty of bowling as many as 13 no balls during the course of the opening day.

Left-arm spinner Shams Mulani (2/44 in 18 overs) was easily the best bowler on the day as he got appreciable bounce and some amount of purchase from the Jamtha track.

Dube (2/35 in 9 overs) also had a couple wickets but one of them was more so because of a splendid one-handed diving catch by Suryakumar Yadav in the slip cordon.

However the bespectacled pair of left-handed Yash Rathod (47 batting) and skipper Akshay Wadkar (13 batting) added 47 for the unbroken sixth wicket. —*PTI*

AGAINST GERMANY

Indian men eye another FIH Pro League win

BHUBANESWAR, 17 FEB

Their campaign back on track after a jittery start, India will look to continue the winning momentum when they take on Paris Olympics silver medallist Germany in their next men's FIH Pro League match here on Tuesday.

India had a woeful start to their home leg matches of the Pro League, losing 1-3 to Spain in their opener.

But the hosts bounced back strongly to tame Spain 2-0 in the return match on Sunday.

With three points from two games, India are currently sitting in eighth place in the standings and will be desperate to climb up the table.

After a relatively off day on Saturday, the Indians looked a completely different side on Sunday, dominating for most part of the match and scoring two field goals through Mandeep Singh (32nd minute) and Dilpreet Singh (39th) to pocket all three points.

India had a woeful start to their home leg matches of the Pro League, losing 1-3 to Spain in their opener **PHOTO: ANI**

While the strikers shone bright in the second game, India's chief coach Craig Fulton would be a bit concerned about penalty corner conversions.

Despite winning seven penalty corners across their two games, India failed to convert a single chance.

In the absence of India captain Harmanpreet Singh, who was rested for the second match, Hockey India League star performer Jugraj Singh cut a sorry figure from set pieces.

The forwardline comprising Dilpreet , Mandeep and Sukhjeet Singh have each netted a goal for India so far in the tournament and will be looking to add to their tally against Germany.

The Indian defence produced a much-better display in the second game, and were able to absorb pressure from the Spanish strikers. —*PTI*

Indian Women eye victory against Spain in Pro League

BHUBANESWAR, 17 FEB

The Indian women's hockey team will be eager to get back to winning ways when it faces a confident Spain in the doubleheader here.

After a promising start with a thrilling 3-2 victory over England in their opener, the India narrowly missed out on a bonus point in their second game, losing 2-1 in a dramatic shootout after the match ended 2-2 in regulation time.

Despite showing resilience, India currently sit in eighth place in the standings with four points from two games and will be looking to climb higher in the points table as they face a confident Spanish side on Tuesday and Wednesday.

India's performance against England offered glimpses of their potential, particularly in penalty corner conversions, where they scored twice from three attempts in their opening match.

However, they failed to replicate that success in the second game, unable to convert any of their three penalty corners.

"Spain is a tricky team, and we know it's going to be a challenging contest. However, we are ready for the challenge," India captain Salima Tete said.

Spain, on the other hand, arrives on the back of two consecutive victories against Germany in the India leg. They secured back-to-back 2-1 wins over the Germans, boosting their confidence.

Match starts 5.15PM on Tuesday and 7.30PM on Wednesday. —*PTI*